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WHERE WILL THIS PATH LEAD!

A TALE OF A SUMMER TRIP.

Six Weeks at the Seaside

And What It Led To.

35

By S. K. DONOVAN.

1898.
THE LANING PRINTING COMPANY.
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Dedication.

There is a woman with whom I have been long in love. It had its birth on her soft breasts. She is no longer young. The chisels of four score years and ten have been carving her features. Her brow is wrinkled—her cheeks are furrowed—her eyes are dimmed. To me her face has grown sweeter as the years have worked upon it. The anointing grace of God rests on it as a splendor. By the exquisite loveliness of that face, I compare all beauty. By the purity of her life, I judge all character. By the devotion of her heart, I measure all love.

To my Mother I Dedicate this Book.

—The Author.

CHAPTER I.

"It is the glorious summer."

"Yes, Miss, our road is the pleasantest in the country. It is the *ne plus ultra* of civil engineering—hope it is not necessary to explain that Latin. Without abrupt curves, it is as smooth as a skating rink. Thoroughly ballasted, with each side grass-platted, it is as free from dust as are the snow-capped Sierras. The scenery *en route* is unparalleled, and therefore incomparable. The eye never wearies for a moment. Change follows change with more rapidity than the shifting scenes of a drama. Variety and beauty first surprise, then captivate, and then entrance. Towering mountain and rolling savannah, wooded slope and inviting glen, babbling stream and placid lake, majestic rivers, and meadows flushed with flowers and teeming with fertility, we span the continent, with lateral branches reaching into every nook and corner of our grand republic."

He was a traveling passenger agent, one of those broad-as-long men, with little pouched eyes, great flabby jowles, stubbed nose, half webbed fingers, with an abdomen like a grass-fed ox, on which he kept one hand to hold it in place, lest it should slough off, while, with the other, he mopped his semi-bald head with a handkerchief already incapable of absorption. Little streams of perspiration percolated from every pore and ran down his

puffed cheeks like drops of water on a window pane. As he finished his piece he drew a long breath, cleared his throat with an "ahem," and peered into our faces with intense inquisitiveness. Grace for a moment returned his stare, then stepped back and scanned him from his overgrown feet to his hairless apex, and said :—"Yes, I have read all about it. Do you do the literary work for the road?"

"Oh! Bless you, no, Miss. We have a hired man for that—literary man of great reputation. But he can't talk. Lacks in gall. He says he pities us who have to assault the multitude. But, your servant, are you going a long distance?"

"No," replied Grace, "only a hundred or so miles down the coast. We dropped in to inquire about trains and secure tickets."

"Your servant, ladies, I will see that you secure every particle of information necessary to your safety and comfort in traveling. Will you accompany me to the ticket office?"

Of course we accompanied him. He regretted that we were not to travel on his line. Our destination was one of the nooks which it did not reach. He assured us that he knew the route well, and that it was admirably managed, particular care being taken to prevent asphyxiation of passengers by dust. When we reached home I remarked :

"I am so glad our rail trip will be pleasant. If there is anything I do abhor, it is dust when traveling. You remember our frightful condition when we got back last summer? I was almost suffocated, and for a fortnight could not relieve myself of the idea that my nostrils and ears were full of dust. I was continually

boring for particles, and ceased only when I felt that I was irritating membranes.''

''Don't flatter yourself with congratulations. I set down as truth the opposite to all he said. He knows nothing about the route we shall take. It is more than probable that he has never been over it. That was a railroad talking-machine. All the companies have them. They are crammed. That speech has undergone almost innumerable rehearsals. Others heard it today before we did, and others have heard it since. It is only necessary to indicate by word or act that you intend to travel, when it begins to rattle. I always listen, but never believe, nor indulge in hope that there is a possibility that what it says is true, and therefore, am never disappointed. Unless a good rain covers the country through which we pass, there will be oceans of dust. I predict that you will be in a semi-comatose state by the time we reach the coast. Supply yourself with cotton. Stop up your ears and nostrils. You will be able to take, through your mouth, your full portion of the dust which is essential to your health during the year.''

Grace is too practical. It seems to give her delight to dissipate illusions. I felt real comfort while that jolly fellow was talking. Indeed, I gave range to my imagination, and with my mind's eye drew a picture of beauty for which I have been longing but have never seen, never having been a hundred miles from the great city, and then having traveled by night, going and coming, to avoid intense heat. She might have permitted the picture to remain. One instant the eye rested on towering mountains, and the next tried to fathom the gloom of some exquisite glen, or lost itself on far-reaching plain, fringed with placid streams and dotted with flocks and

herds. A ballasted road, rivaling the very rocks for solidity, with entire absence of dust, and just sufficient rocking motion in the train to impress one that you are swinging in a hammock to and fro, in answer to the breeze. Grace has all the qualities and characteristics of an iconoclast. A few days ago I was indulging in a rhapsody on the happiness of the D—'s with whom she had been visiting for a week, when she smashed my fancy work with—

"Yes, happy as people unfitted for each other can be. Daily pouts, petty misunderstandings, silly-mannered make-ups, impressing one with the idea that one's presence alone prevented severe agitation of the family atmosphere. Lizzie can't bear to have Harry act strong and manly. She keeps him in a sophomoric mood, and thinks he ought to be always and forever playing with his kitten. I suffered mental pain half my waking hours with them. I found it necessary on one occasion to give her a delicate lecture. In response she whined, and then mewed and purred until I felt that I had been cruel."

"Grace," I said, "if I thought I should suffer from dust as I did last summer, I would not go one step."

"Yes, you would."

"I would not."

"Yes, but you would."

"I think I ought to know my own mind."

"You do not."

"Miss Tyrant, I will not go."

"Then I will go alone."

"You will not go alone."

"Then you will go with me. I must have somebody to take care of me, and you are the only person who can."

"Take care of you, Grace. Well, I declare."

"Don't make any declarations. You must take care of me. I don't need a guard against personal danger, but I must have somebody to prevent me from doing 'foolish things'—that is the expression, I believe. How often have you told Papa that I cannot be trusted alone. He believes it—has a most foolish confidence in your judgment as to the proprieties, and so have I. My good old auntie, you are going, for I am going. Yes, going, though Sahara clouds envelop us all the way, aren't we, dear?"

As she closed the sentence she threw her arms around me, and, laughing, tried to kiss me, but I fought her off the best I could, and finally submitted. Of course, I had to go. Had I been dying to remain, I would have died had I remained. She had determined to spend the summer on the beach at B—. I had never heard of the place. She assigned no reason for going there, and was extremely indefinite while speaking of the selection. I was a little pouty, and determined to discover the whys for going to this out-of-the-way place.

"Grace, when did you learn of this beach, a love for which you so suddenly and intensely manifest?"

"I am not in love with it. I know nothing about it, other than that a railroad man says it is a quiet place, and most of the visitors are invalids."

"From a railroad man," I said in surprise. "Pray, what railroad man do you know?"

"Don't know any. I got it from a nice little circular which I picked from a bundle in the city passenger cars, and was won, as were you, by that 'talking-machine.' It just exhausted language in describing the beauties of the beach. I am confident that it contained but one truth. It said that it is a quiet spot far from the world's

alarm. I indulge the hope that that is true. We will decide by testing.''

''Grace, this is wild-goosing. Why not go to the 'Pier' or the 'Orchard' or to Newport, or some quieter place of which you know something?''

''Don't mention them. I am tired of Newport, and the 'Orchard,' and Saratoga, and the mountains. Experience is a repulsive medicine. I never take but one dose of it. I am tired of fashion and folly—weary of the seeming and pretense which crowd the established resorts, and I am longing for something that is new, fresh and pure. It is possible, perhaps probable, that I shall be disappointed. I may find things falser than those with which I am familiar. We will go to this point on the coast and enjoy its beauties and pleasures as set down in print, or discover that the unreal is everywhere—that 'seeming' is the song of the world, and that while social life has its prima donnas, the weakest hum at the song. A strange sentiment seized me when I read the circular. I was impressed that that was my objective point for the summer. Something is there or something will happen, which will enable us to fill up sixty days of life pleasantly. I cannot give a reason for my conceit. You may call it a whim, or what you please, but I feel that out of it will grow matters of more importance to my life than all that has heretofore occurred. We must go in the morning—rather sudden, but we shall need but little preparation. This is not to be a season of fashion. Besides, I want to test your oft repeated remark that you are always in marching order and ready to start at the tap of the drum.''

I submitted without a word, entering into all her arrangements as though I had planned them. At dark-

ness we commenced to pack, and it was away into the night before we completed the work. Grace finished first and passed through the communicating door to her own room. When I finished, "Well, it's done," I remarked. No response came from Grace, and I slipped into her room. Poor, tired thing, I found her fast asleep in a rocker. I kissed her awake, and bade her good night, reminding her that the train started at 6 A. M.

I was unable to go to sleep. My mind busied itself with the last three seasons. Her first summer was satisfactory to us but did not seem to be appreciated by Grace, who laughed at our earnestness. Her second was more successful than the first. There was adoration everywhere, and she touched hearts until they throbbed with delight or ached with anguish. When it was over, she was utterly unconcerned and likened it to a treadmill. Last summer she really mowed her way to triumph.

Her rivals fringed her path as autumn leaves a walk. At its close, she severed every tie and dismissed, without ceremony, every acquaintance the season had brought. Never at home to any of the "Summer folks." Refused to talk of them, and dismissed each effort to draw her mind back to them by saying, "I have forgotten them. They were transients."

CHAPTER II.

"Under the opening eyelids of the morn."

Grace was up and dressed for the trip before she awoke me. Usually I am the earlier riser, but this morning I slept soundly notwithstanding I had determined to rise at dawn.

"I am ready to start. It is only an hour and a half until train time. Breakfast is waiting. Would have waked you sooner, only I wanted to get through my fussing before you commenced yours." "Bustle, bustle," she said, tapping me on the brow with her fingers and then leaving the room.

"Oh, do come," she called.

"Coming," I replied. I almost jumped into my traveling habit. On reaching the foot of the stairs I met her coming from her father's room. Big pearly looking drops were hanging in the corners of her eyes, at which she struck with the tips of her gloves. Twirling me around in the direction of her father's room, she said :

"Go quick and get your instructions." In a few seconds I had secured them. They were very brief— "Take care of her."

To me it seemed silly to place Grace in my charge. I am argued or cajoled out of every position which does not suit her views, and thus, instead of guiding and

directing her, I am led. She claims to be in slavery to me, answering every beck and call, and doing my bidding with lamb-like resignation. It is the purest fiction. It is I who am in servitude. She rules me absolutely.

Her ways of attaining her ends are indescribable and always effective. A marvel of beauty, she does not seem conscious of it. Her figure is the perfection of symmetry. Her carriage and mien just sufficiently haughty to insure dignity and instantly command attention. The plainest gown or the most costly, neither detracts nor adds to the charms of her person or the grace of her manner. Faultless in feature and formation, her face is lighted by eyes with the depth of ocean and comprehension of space. Every thought she has finds expression in her face. Passion and resignation, determination and tenderness, womanly timidity and stoical firmness, give place to each other as her heart dictates.

A cup of coffee and a roll and then the carriage. On entering the station she indulged in a long drawn yawn.

"You observe, auntie, *it* is not about."

"You mean the adipose ticket agent?"

"Yes. What will we do without him? Perhaps that dapper little fellow bedizened with braid and lace, standing at the front of the sleeper, contains the necessary information." She addressed him:

"Palace car for the beach at B—?"

There was an affirmative answer, and we were aided to the platform.

"I hope it is a fresh one," she said, as she entered. "If it has been on the road all night, and crowded, we will come near closing the game of life before we reach the beach."

I observed her nose wrinkle and her upper lip assume a more decided curl, as she turned her head to say:

"The cattle are still sleeping. Fortunately only four sections are in use and the air does not completely stifle, though it is bad enough. I don't like the appearance of those boots,"—pointing to a pair of large brogans, which looked as if they had had a bath of oil. "The porter was afraid to assault them, nor do I wonder that he should be."

"Grace, don't talk so loud," I said, "and cease criticism and comment."

"As to persons, yes, but as to a sleeper which has been in use all night, no. Next to a charnel house is a crowded palace car at six A. M. Though the weather were smothering in sultriness, the windows are all down, lest some old rheumatic or some young fashion-killed Miss, who has laced and danced her life away, should take cold. Even this atmosphere, though the car has undergone ventilation since its arrival at the station, is scarcely bearable. Imagine it before ventilated, when every berth has been occupied. No, dear, don't try to imagine it. Take the other side and get close to the window."

We were soon flying over the road, through a country possessing few attractions. There was an abundance of red clay, indifferent dwellings constructed without taste, which were fit companions for the stunted pines and scrubby white oaks which broke what would otherwise have been a most monotonous landscape. A slight rain had fallen during the night, just sufficient to lay the dust, and thus relieve us of the suffocation which Grace had predicted. The air was cool, fresh and winey, and

as we were whirled along Grace indulged in criticism and comparison, and the country suffered as she dwelt on the beauty of the Berkshire hills and the splendor of the banks of the Hudson and the Merrimac. She turned her face toward the berths with the remark :

"I wish those people would rise. I am impatient to see them and indulge in a little mental dissection."

"I am sorry they are not aware of your wishes. If they were they would bound out of their beds like balls. It would be so pleasant to know that a lady of elegant attainments was waiting to tear them into tatters."

"Aunt Rebecca, keep the poison hidden, dear. Irony is pardonable only when it lacks malignity. Your temper is a bad leader. Learn to curb it, or you will certainly be unhappy."

"Grace, you are a descendant of the harpies."

"Concede I am. They were not without their uses. But my dear aunt, I know you are worried. I'll be good and prim from this evermore, and, as an evidence of my repentance, read that. It is the circular which won me to the seaside haven of B—. Comfort yourself with the reflection that you are *en route* for the most delicious watering place on the coast. The circular says so. Be sweet now."

I took the circular and while listlessly looking it over, I heard a call in a weak voice of—

"Brother, brother."

In an instant there sprang from an opposite berth a man who seemed to be waiting for the call. He drew aside the curtain and lifted out a girl of sixteen, the frailest human existence I had ever seen.

"Laced and danced to death," whispered Grace. I gave her a look which was intended to be severe. She smiled in return, and then seemed annoyed.

The man steadied the invalid for a few moments, and then, partly carrying her, started for the ladies' toilet room. As he passed our section, a curve in the road twirled him around, and, to save himself from falling, dropped on the seat fronting Grace, with his burden in his arms. The young girl laughed at the mishap, and, turning to Grace, said:

"Pardon, Miss." Then to her brother, "think I can walk alone. I feel much stronger this morning. My sleep last night was excellent. Were I to travel constantly, I should soon be well again. Let me try to walk alone."

She arose and stood unsteadily for a moment. Just as she made the first step, Grace's arm encircled her waist. They looked into each other's faces a moment, when the invalid threw her arms around Grace's neck, and without a word the brother was relieved of his charge, and Grace had her alone in possession. I followed them a few steps, and then returned to my seat. Grace is right in calling me an old maid. I lose my self-possession just when I need it most. Instead of speaking to the gentleman, and thus easing the situation, I looked out of the window in silence and abstraction, not even noting the ugly red clay banks of the deep cut through which we were passing. How long I looked, whether for moments or minutes, I do not know. I felt my nerves giving way, and in sheer restlessness I turned and faced him. His great eyes were fixed on me—were absorbing me.

"Pardon, madam, who is the lady who accompanied my sister?"

"Grace Preston, of New York," I replied, and on the instant was myself again. We chatted of the delicious morning, the fresh air, the uninteresting landscape and the sterile soil, but not one word about the sister or Grace. He was six feet high, broad shouldered, wide chested, brown haired, grey eyed, with strong features, decisive mouth and big jaw. His brow was low, broad and square, and his eyes set wide apart. Nose prominent but not excessive. The more I looked in his face the more I was impressed that a man—a big, strong, healthy, manly man, was talking to me. In a few minutes I excused myself and went to the toilet room. I found Grace seated with the young girl's head resting on her breast, while the former's right hand was toying with a frill around the invalid's neck. As I entered, Grace said:

"Miss McMillan, my aunt, Miss Rebecca Duncan, of New York."

Then, in a voice sweet as sweet bells the invalid spoke, reaching out her hand. "You will excuse me I am resting. Invalids must rest. I am in search of the most precious of all things, health. It has returned to me wonderfully for the last few days. I will soon be strong. Brother says that the ocean's breath will flood my cheeks with the hues of the rose, and I believe him."

I could not help it. In an instant I had kissed her brow. Then, reaching out my arms, I said:

"Grace, let me hold her. You are not strong."

"No, auntie, dear. You have had no experience with invalids, and I have. I nursed to robust health

that widow's daughter who lived in the alley, in the rear of our home. The attending physician said I was the rarest nurse he ever saw. Aunt Rebecca, she is our charge—that is, sometimes I will permit you to wait upon her. We have already come to an understanding, and she has promised to follow my counsel in all things. She, too, is bound for the beach at B—."

"Except when it is at variance with that of my brother," smilingly interrupted Miss McMillan.

"Oh, he and I will always agree. We know what is best for invalids."

Miss McMillan laughed as she gazed steadily into Grace's face, and then said, "I want you to love him, and know you will. You will not be an exception to everybody."

The blood jumped to Grace's face and throat, giving a venetian red to the delicate peachblow tints that were her natural color.

"We'll see," replied Grace.

Miss McMillan told us that in the previous October she had been attacked by typhoid fever. All the fall and winter she had been confined to her room, and most of the time to her bed. There was a long period when she lingered on the dividing line between life and death. When the fever broke, it left her weak and helpless, and for weeks she grew weaker instead of stronger. She languished without pain or suffering, save the terrible oppression of weakness. She lost all fear of death and hourly talked with the grim monster, canvassing his power and complacently waiting his summons. She said that without fear she had looked both ways. All her heart reaches were for earth and those she loved, while those of her brain were for the great beyond, anxious

and feverish at times to cross the line and settle with the mysteries. She thought that her heart ties were the stronger and therefore she still lived, and now hoped for complete recovery. With the first balmy waves of spring she had been carried to the window, where she sat for hours, watching the bursting of the buds, and listening to the love stories of the birds, as they told them in sweetest song. Spring passed and summer came, but she gathered but little strength. Her physician advised that she be taken to the seaside, and her brother eagerly complied with the advice. He had been her nurse in all her sickness. They were alone in the world. Father, mother, sisters and brothers, were all gone. As she ceased speaking, Grace bent down and kissed her.

"Lift me. I must return that," she said, as she struggled to rise from her reclining position. I raised her, when she put her hands on Grace's cheeks, and then passionately kissed her, while the arms of Grace tenderly entwined themselves around the wasted form and pressed the invalid close to her heart.

We returned to our seats. Introductions followed. Grace's cheeks flushed and her eyes looked to the floor, when Mr. McMillan, with much warmth of language, thanked her for the courtesy. Observing her embarassment he went to the forward part of the car, leaving his sister with us. She rested against Grace like a kitten. And so we chatted, and chatted, for an hour. She then expressed a wish for her berth, saying—

"Oh, I have sat up so long, and have been so happy."

Her brother came and picked her up in his strong arms, with a gentleness and ease indescribable, and pillowed her in her berth, seating himself opposite her.

Grace and I went to our original seats. The rain had been heavier near the sea, and there was not a particle of dust. Turning to Grace, I said:

"You slandered our fat friend, who assured us the road would be free from dust."

"The elements aided him to tell the truth," she replied. "Had it not rained you would have been suffocated two hours ago. Besides, this is not his route."

"How fruitful you are in defense."

"That is a happy accomplishment. Embarrassment is a fearful condition. I have never experienced its wretchedness."

"Are you sure of that?" I asked, with a quizzical expression in my eye. Grace understood it, for she turned suddenly to the window and commenced finding fault with the barrenness of the land and the unattractiveness of the country.

Miss McMillan was all aglow when the train came to a stop at the beach. The last hour's ride was along the shore. The great crested waves were constantly in view, and their roar could be heard above the noise of the train. A stiff breeze was blowing inward, and as she drank in the refreshing air, she seemed to gather strength with each breath. A few minutes were spent in gathering up our luggage, so that we were last to leave the car. Mr. McMillan started with his sister on his arm. As he stepped from the platform and reached up for the invalid, a crippled boy who was standing near, dropped his crutch and threw up both his arms as though he would have taken her. As she dropped into her brother's arms, the cripple threw his hands around the folds of her dress. As Grace stepped from the platform, the boy

reached for her capote and shawl, with both of which she parted.

"Grace," I said, "don't be so careless. Hold to your things."

"Never mind. They are in safe hands," she replied.

"Yes, Miss, they're safe, hunkie safe," said the cripple, as he reached for a basket I was carrying, but I refused to part with it, after my admonition to Grace. We got into a rickety old omnibus, which no doubt had done service in one of the great cities, until it was unworthy of confidence.

"Look," said Grace, nudging me in the side and pointing to the rear.

There I saw the crippled boy, hopping along in the dust, in a vain endeavor to keep up with the omnibus. There was the usual reception committee, I suppose, on the veranda, but they seemed better mannered than at the fashionable resorts. The invalid attracted most attention, as her brother almost carried her on his arm. We were soon in our rooms. They were meagerly furnished. Everything was meager. As Grace took in the brief surroundings she remarked:

"No doubt we are expected to live in the surf. We cannot live in these rooms. We were expected to bring our wardrobes to hold our wardrobes."

"As we are not going to receive in our chambers, we can stretch lines across the rooms and hang our clothes on them. Oh, you will be miserable enough here," I added.

"Listen to me, Aunt Rebecca," said Grace, with unusual earnestness. "I have had more happiness on this trip thus far, than I had the entire last summer. I intend to continue in happiness, and feel that I will."

Then we sat down on the two little chairs and crossed our hands on our laps, and, well, we yawned, and impatiently waited for our baggage. Neither spoke, yet I felt that our minds were traveling in the same path, and that one was not fault finding with our situation. To a rap at the door, Grace said "Come." In stepped the crippled boy with the luggage Grace had given him.

"What is your name," she asked.

"Racketts, please mum."

"Racketts," repeated Grace.

"The same," replied the boy.

"Why, that is a strange name. Racketts what?" she inquired.

"Racketts nothing."

"Just plain Racketts?"

"That's all."

"Do you live in the hotel?" she continued.

"I can't say I does, yet I does."

"Then you do, and again you do not. That is a contradiction."

"I guess it is. I stay here when I wants to," explained the cripple. "Most of the time I would rather be with them."

"Is this your home?"

"No, Miss, I lives in New York when I doesn't live here. I comes here to work, and can do better here in the summer time than there. Then, the Major, he likes to be here. Jist as soon as the weather gits warm, he's askin' all the time to come down here."

"Who is the Major?" asked Grace.

"He's awaitin' for me at the door," to which he stepped and opened. There stood a small Scotch terrier

dog, who reared up and commenced pawing the air at the appearance of his master.

"It's not healthy for the Major in New York when the dog law is goin'," continued the boy. "Three years ago they had him up two times and was going to drown him. It took all my money to save him, so I had to go out of the city with him, and I came here. I left this year before they started the law."

"Why, you must love him."

"I does. 'Cause why? He loves me."

She handed him half a dollar. The boy looked at it and then at Grace. Did so again and again, and then said:

"It's too much, mum."

"No," replied Grace, "I allow you that for carrying the luggage."

"Thankee, mum, but I thought it was too much. If you ever want anything done, send for Racketts," saying which he scraped himself out of the room. When the door closed I said:

"Grace, you have commenced your foolish actions."

"I have, have I?" she answered.

"Yes. Why have you attached to yourself that little vagrant? He will haunt these rooms in the hope of getting another half-dollar. Nuisances will gather around us fast enough, without our courting them."

"Aunt Rebecca, I wish something would open your mental eyes. Your discernment is in a constant state of stupor. That boy is not a vagrant—would not, and could not be one. He has in him all the qualities and traits which make up splendid manhood. Has a brain uncultivated, and a heart thoroughly developed. The former is fallow ground, the latter in the highest state of

cultivation, bearing constantly the richest fruit. Did you observe his face the moment Miss McMillan got from the train? She dropped into the poor little cripple's heart, and in his love he stretched out his arms to care for her. There is an angel in that boy. Not a crippled angel, but perfect as God makes them. When it is best and rarest, what a poor thing the tenement is in which the soul lives. More happiness, Aunt Rebecca. What a delightful place this will be. We shall need Racketts, frequently."

We were too late for dinner, so we dressed for supper. There were but few people in the supper room, and most of them were invalids.

I noticed one old couple of distinguished mien and presence, who, I thought, were very necessary to each other. After supper Grace visited Miss McMillan. She found her in bed, cheerful as a cricket. Her heart is wonderfully healthy, and her body must grow strong. When Grace returned she entered the room in an absent minded manner, and I asked:

"How is Miss McMillan?"

"He's well."

"What!" I exclaimed.

She blushed, looked annoyed, and replied:

"Aunt Rebecca, you make yourself ridiculous. You have nothing in you but interrogation points. I was thinking of something else when you spoke—of poor, crippled Racketts."

"So you were," I replied, with a light laugh. "We shall need Racketts frequently while here."

She, in return to my sally, laughed one of her sweet little chuckles. Then taking my hands she looked steadily into my face and said:

"Read."

"I cannot. Could I look into your heart as I do into your face, I might be able. One of these days I shall get a peep into your heart. A sigh will open the door."

"There you are mistaken. My heart is nothing but a lump of putty, and just as expressionless. There will be no sigh. Be still now, and I will tell you all about Miss McMillan and, and—"

"Her brother," I interjected.

"No, I did not see him. I was going to tell you of his sister's condition, but your mind and Mr. McMillan seem involved, and I will give you an opportunity to relieve yourself. What do you think of him?"

"What do I think of him? Why should I have an opinion regarding him?"

"Why, my dear old aunt. You are wounded. The barbed shaft has penetrated your heart," she said with a little laugh, touching my cheeks with her hands and turning my face to the dingy light of a kerosene lamp.

"What nonsense!" Strange, I had to gather my thoughts. I was thinking of something else when you asked the question," I replied.

"Of Racketts, I suppose," she interrupted.

"No, he is not needed on my account. It is seldom I require a foil, and in this instance I certainly need none. I was thinking of you, and, well, in truth my thoughts were tangled, and I was asking myself over and over again, the same question."

"What question so perplexed you. Tell me and I will give the answer."

I gazed into her face a moment and then said:

"My thoughts were, 'where will this path lead?'"

"What path? What are you talking about? I beg you get clear of mystery and speak in plain words," she nervously replied. "To what do you refer?"

I remained silent, and we looked into each other's faces. I felt that her heart was babbling like a brook, but the story was for the flowers which graced it and perfumed its whole. Then Grace in a semi-conscious manner said:

"Where will this path lead? For the present we will not discuss it. It is dismissed until to-morrow, or next week, or, perhaps, forever."

She kissed me good-night. I was nervous and feverish, and it was hours before I fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

"And like a lane of beams athwart the sea."

Grace was up before the sun, and I was as the dead —not even dreaming, so soundly I slept. I awoke with the words, "dinner," "dinner," ringing in my ears. Grace was at the side of my bed, and, as I opened my eyes, saluted me with:

"Oh, you sluggard! Get up and drink in the glories of the sea and sky and air."

I was soon out on the balcony. The vast expanse of water was gently undulating, with here and there a white cap, as though some monster of the deep had disturbed its otherwise comparative calm surface. The sky to the east was a rich saffron, paling to the west, where it was a delicate blue. The air tasted as if it had spent the night in a bath, and was fresh and purified. The landscape was horrid. To the north, sand, and an arm of the sea. The stunted pines and scrubby oaks which marked our route, were gone. A great bank of clouds which seems to be resting on the sea, closed the vision in that direction. To the west fields of sand with an occasional tuft of coarse grass, and beyond, the toboggan on which the sun slips down at close of day. On the south the monotony is broken. A rocky promonotorv reaches out into the sea. At its inward base there are green fields, adorned with cedar thickets, and

miles away there is a fringe of woodland. Near the cedar thickets are little cottages, which look lost and forsaken, and seem as though they had stolen away from the outskirts of some great city, and were pining to get back. Between the south and west points, and, apparently but a few miles away, there is a scattered growth of trees, over the tops of which can be seen a few chimney tops and a single church spire. As for the hotel, it is most properly named the "Sphinx." There is not a particle of shade nor any green thing near it. Sand everywhere, and it sits on its loose foundations, a great board thing, which once might have had life, but which has been parched to death.

"Splendid, is it not?" said Grace.

"Splendid! Why, no. Were it not for that great throbbing sea, it would be desolation itself," I replied.

"Oh, no. Not as desolate as I desire," she replied.

"It would be difficult to make it more so."

She stood for a few moments, silent. Her eyes were on the great ocean, and her bosom was swelling in response to that of the mighty waves.

"It lives, and has lived through all the centuries of the stars, and it will live until decay has consumed the earth itself. If there is vital principle to that which is inanimate, the sea possesses it." Turning to me she continued: "There is isolation on its wide expanse. Did you ever long to be alone? To be in the center of silence, surrounded by outer darkness? I have. I have yearned for it. I am moody this morning, and that is not good. But I have seen that sea hundreds of times, and have never been impressed by it as I am now. Oh, the sea!—the grand, sublime, almost infinite sea!"

"Talk of it. I love to hear you," I said as she paused.

"No, no more. We will dismiss the sea from our minds. Do you observe that little village with its unpretentious church spire? We will go there to worship, provided we stay."

What do you mean by "provided we stay"? I asked.

"I scarcely mean anything," she replied. "Something—some incident—or some accident—or—well, something, may take us away. The probabilities are that that something will remain absent, as indeed it should, for if we do not stay here, we will go back to our city home and remain there."

"Well, Grace, get out of your mood as quickly as possible." Saying which, I left her gazing out on the sea, whose unrest was singing to the shore the same story it has told the ages, and which it will continue to tell until time shall be no more.

CHAPTER IV.

"Make me a child again."

After breakfast there came a rap at the door, and I said "Come in." The door opened and there stood Racketts holding by the hand one of the fairest, sweetest, dearest little human wonders I had ever seen, a little six year old girl. She was blonde, with large dark gray eyes, and a wealth of golden hair, hanging in masses over her shoulders; was neatly but plainly dressed, and gazed into our faces with a look of amazement. Racketts held her right hand, while at her side stood the "Major," unable to hold the left one, but attesting his devotion to her by occasionally licking it.

"Come in," said Grace, having noticed Racketts only.

"I always come with her," said Racketts, which attracted Grace to a further observation of the visitors. Without a word she took the little girl by the hand and seated her on an excuse for a lounge, then took a seat at her side. Racketts and the Major stood near by. While Grace still gazed into the face of the child, Racketts said:

"Her Ma does up all the laces and nice things for the ladies at the hotel, and I told her that I was sure you would have plenty to do up.

"Does your mother wash?" asked Grace of the child.

"Yes, Miss, laces and nice things."

"Where does your mother live?"

"In the cottage."

"Yes, Miss, in the cottage near the cedars. I will show you where it is," put in Racketts.

"What is your name?"

"Mary Hastings."

"Yes, but we all calls her Mamie," said Racketts. "Her Ma, and me and the old doctor and his wife, and Joe, and uncle Tom, and all of us calls her Mamie, 'cept her sick pa, he always calls her Mary."

"Well, Mamie, or Mary, I like that name better," said Grace, "I am sure you are a dear, sweet child, and I want you to love me while I am here."

"Oh, she does. I told her all about you before she went to bed last night, and she said that she loved you. Didn't you, Mamie?"

"Yes," said the child. "We loved you last night and we loves you this morning too, and we do."

Grace let go the child's hand, and without a reply went into her own room. I heard her clear her throat as if there was a lump in it. Returning she took the little fair-haired child in her arms, kissed her time and again, and said:

"Tell your mother that I am coming to see her. Racketts will show me the way."

"That's hunkie, isn't it, Mamie?" said Racketts, as he led the little one by the hand from the room, he on one side and the Major on the other; the latter, at the command of his master, reared himself and made a bow. As the door closed, Grace said:

"That is your vagrant."

"Yes," I replied, "We will need him frequently while we remain here."

She gave her shoulders a little twist, but made no response.

I wish I knew something about the McMillans. They are certainly refined, quiet people. His manner indicates a line of elegant ancestors. Grace says he is brainy. His devotion to his sister is evidence of the qualities of his heart. His face shows character in every line. Not a handsome man—his features are too strong for beauty. He is a commanding man. Yet, I am not competent to judge. My conclusions are not worth a straw. I wish I possessed Grace's power. She reads character with unerring precision. I did not see anything good in that crippled boy. To me he was a castaway, a vagrant. Her perception and estimate of him were instantaneous and correct. Poor little fellow. Brief as has been his life, what sorrows may be hidden in it. What suffering, devotion, and, perhaps heroism he may have felt or exhibited. He quits his home in the city to save the life of his dog. There is a depth of affection in that incident. How incomprehensible is the human heart. All hopes, aspirations and desires are its offspring. It births our loves, our hates, our revenges; prompts all actions whether they be good or evil; sits in judgment and disposes of our destiny. How intense its longings, how varied its demands. In one instant it craves wealth until a seeming insatiate greed is satisfied. In another, the wildest pleasures with their attendant dissipations, until mind and body are wrecked. Or, again, fashion with her waiting maids, folly and vanity, sacrificing every ennobling trait, and debasing every virtuous impulse. But, why attempt a dissection of it?

It is enough that it is the home of faith, that force which comforts in the hour of trial and lifts the soul beyond earth, its sorrows and disappointments. Little things creep into it. That cripple boy fills his with a dog—at least it occupies a large part of it. There must be other things in it, and when next I meet him, I will try to discover what are the dog's companions. And that grey-eyed, fair-haired child, is it possible that her young heart is filled with sorrow at the very threshhold of life? It were better perhaps, for all of us, did we start in life with the sponge touching our lips, but that is a terrible thought, for it calls to mind the tragedy of all the ages.

CHAPTER V.

"The rain a deluge of showers."—"Can eyes talk?"

It has rained almost constantly for five days. Dressing a little, eating too frequently and sleeping too much, have filled the weary hours. This monotonous routine has been broken by a business call from Racketts, more for reporting the condition of things generally than anything else. One visit from the grey-eyed child, and quite a number of visits by Grace, (occasionally I accompanied her) to Miss McMillan's room. Strange, she is improving under the disadvantageous conditions.

It does not require the least exertion on the part of the clouds to drop their treasures. Looking to the east it seems that they dip themselves into the sea until they are loaded with water. On reaching the land an invisible force gives them a squeeze, and they just pour. It does not come down in drops, but in streams. The sands have spongy properties and drink up the water as if each grain had a little mouth. There are no little rivulets coursing in all directions, nor full gutters, as in the city. Even the volumes thrown from the spouts, which the roofs feed, sink into the sand within ten feet. Grace has been alternately moody, or excessively animated, during this spell. The latter feeling is shown when she has spent an hour with Florence McMillan.

She occasionally discusses the weather with malignant earnestness, and spends hours of silence, gazing out into the sea, where the clouds get their supplies.

Racketts was here this morning. What a wonderful little compound of sense and heart he is. I said to him, "Racketts, have you a mother?"

"That's what I have, and that's all," he answered.

"Do you love her?"

"I do, hunkie. She couldn't get along without me. I supports her. She calls me her staff."

"Why, how do you support her?" I inquired.

"By workin'. I works days and I works nights, and I never tires, cause she's always with me."

"Always with you? I do not understand you."

"I don't mean that way. I mean I'm always thinkin' about her."

"And that keeps you from getting tired?"

"Yes, Miss, and the Major too."

"What has the Major to do with your work?"

"Oh, he keeps up the cheerful. You would almost die laughin', if you were ever so tired, to see that dog show sense. He's quiet in the presence of strangers, as you sees him now but he's mighty lively when he and me's alone."

"How did you get hurt?" I asked.

"Mother says that's a family secret," he replied, turning his face from me.

"Then I do not want to know. How old are you, and how long have you been supporting your mother?"

"I'm eleven next winter. Ever since I could use my crutch well. That's three years ago."

"I would dearly like to know your mother. You must give me her address, and when I return to New York I will call on her."

"Thanks, Miss. I'd be so glad, and she'd be so glad. She's not ugly but pretty, and good and sweet like the other young lady."

"Do you mean Miss Grace?"

"Yes, Miss, is that her name? May I call her Miss Grace?"

"Yes, you may call her Miss Grace. I am Miss Rebecca. So now you know our names."

"Thanks, Miss Rebecca. I must go now. I wish you knowed the Major well."

"I will learn to know him. Always bring him with you. Good morning."

"Good morning, Miss Rebecca," and then turning to the Major—"Manners!"

The little dog reared on his hind legs and hopped off with his master. When they reached the door, both turned and each bowed.

Racketts is crippled in the right hip joint and knee. From the hip down the leg is stiff and he moves as if he were dragging his right side along. They had scarcely left me when Grace bounded into the room.

"Well, you have had the vagrant with you," she said.

"Yes," I replied, "and a dear little vagrant he is. Grace, I beg a truce on the vagrant matter. What do you want me to promise, with the understanding that you are never to refer to that unhappy expression of mine? I promise not to be offensive to you in word, deed, or even in thought, if you will never refer to it again."

"You promise that you will be good, and let me do all that fancy or caprice may suggest—commend all my follies, and second all my schemes either in love or war?"

"Yes, I will do anything or everything, will report you absolutely perfect. I cannot tell you how much each reference to it wounds me."

"Hold up your lips that we may covenant."

She threw her arms around my neck and kissed me again and again.

"By this act we have sealed the covenant. Remember, I am to be obeyed hereafter, not you. You are not to have opinions when they conflict with mine."

"Oh, I may have opinions, but you must reason me out of them as you always have."

"That reply is almost a violation of the covenant," said Grace.

"Well, then, the covenant goes without qualification. How is Miss McMillan this morning?"

"Auntie, she is the only living thing about the miserable place."

"Is her brother dead?" I interrupted.

"There, you have violated the covenant," she said with stern, precise voice.

"Why, no!" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, you are offensive, which you promised not to be."

"Why, I thought you had lost all interest in him, living or dead."

"So I have, in a sense I am not able to explain. It is not, however, necessary for you to remind me of it."

"Grace, dear, do not deceive yourself. You certainly cannot deceive me. But I will live up to the

covenant, and never refer to him unless you invite. I think it were an easy matter to lose him," I added.

In an instant the blood left her face, and she stood for a moment looking into my eyes most intently. Then, without saying a word, she passed to her room. I was left with my thoughts, and the question "Where will this path lead?" pressed itself with increased force. There was an echo in my brain, but no answer came. Before I was aware of her presence she was at my side.

"Aunt Rebecca," she said, in the most serious tone I ever heard her use, "I have nothing to conceal from you. A strange visitor has crept into my heart, whom I scarcely know how to treat. Without design, or desire, or consent, George McMillan has settled there, and this moment fills it to complete fullness. In doing so he has not crowded out other loves, dear to me as my life. On the contrary he has brought a sister with him and given her to me. My stores of affection are richer than before I knew him, and I now possess a wealth of love for which I have longed, but feared would never be mine."

"That will do, dear. Say no more. You must not go farther on this path for the present," I said, as I almost gathered her in my arms.

"No farther?" she whispered, while her eyes apparently gazed at vacancy.

"Yes, no farther, my dear. We must stop right here for the present."

"How can I stop? What barriers can I put up? This tenant has preëmpted, and I am already in his possession."

"Oh, Grace dear, why do you talk so? Have you made a confession of this love to him?" I pleadingly asked.

"No, and to other than father and yourself, would not for all this world," she replied, straightening up and assuming one of her dignified poses.

"What has he said to you?" I asked.

"Of love? Not one word."

"Grace, you confound me. No declaration?"

"None. In all our conversation no subject has been more foreign than that of love."

"Then you surmise he loves you?"

"I surmise nothing. I know that he does, for my heart tells me so. His eyes are worth a thousand tongues, and my heart is worth millions of them."

"Grace, you have made me very unhappy. I fear that your heart has controlled your eyes and that you are blindly wading in the unknown."

"Not I. Had he declared his love, I might have doubted; as he is silent, I believe."

"Oh, this is fearful—fearful. I fear for you, dear," I almost sighed. "Will it last?" I exclaimed more than asked.

"Will it last?" she repeated, "yes, until eternity ends."

"Grace, dear, I know not how to advise you. These heart questions are the severest of all problems. How few solve them aright? What shall we do?" I asked, almost in despair.

"As for me, I shall continue to love. I shall husband the sweetest comfort my heart has ever known. You may do the repining. Oh, a pretty watch you have kept over your charge. You have permitted me to do the most foolish of all things," she said, clasping me in her arms and kissing me.

"Grace, cease. I am suffering enough without the addition of your raillery. What will your father say? What will he do? How can you confess your love to him? It would look as though the love were all on your side. Your father would not understand eyes-talk."

"He did once. It was when my mother was a girl, and he impatiently watched every glance of her eyes, which told him the story of her heart. Auntie, he has not forgotten the girlhood eyes of my mother. Time and again he has said to me, 'yours are your mother's eyes when I first met her. There was a world of meaning in her every glance.'"

"Well, dear, it may be that I am mistaken and that he will comprehend eyes-talk. But we must inform your father of the state of affairs. Perhaps it were better we waited until Mr. McMillan becomes more pronounced—until he proposes to you."

"There is no necessity for that. Mr. McMillan will tell father all about it, and ask him to give him (Mr. McMillan) his daughter."

"Grace, you dumfound me. What does this mean? You tell me that he has never uttered a word of love to you. Now you tell me that he is going to ask your father for you. It is all incomprehensible to me."

"We had a pleasant talk this morning, in which he spoke of a visit to New York. If his sister continues to improve, and he feels safe to leave her in my care, he will go to New York within ten days. He expressed a wish to meet my father and I gave him father's business address. It is possible that I will give him a letter of introduction. It may aid him in his business."

"Aid him in his business! Is he so confiding as to tell you his business affairs?"

"No, he has not; but I think I can safely infer what takes him to New York."

"Well, you abound in assumption. I hope you are correct. That would relieve our unpleasant situation."

"Use the singular pronoun. I am not unpleasantly situated. I am entirely satisfied. I think my condition is good and wholesome and greatly to be desired."

"You are then more fortunate than I, for I am filled with concern about you."

"Well, a truce to this subject. It is getting threadbare. Let me tell you about Miss McMillan. She walks about her room, (you know what a dingy little hole it is) singing like a bird, and calls the weather charming. Holds her hands out of the window until they are spattered with big raindrops; said to me that within a fortnight she would have the strength of a tigress, and mayhap tear me up for very love. When she had wearied herself she lay down and asked me to bring my chair to her side. She threw her arms around my neck, kissed me, and whispered in my ear the word 'sister,' and then buried her face in the pillow."

"Oh, Grace, I thought you had dismissed that subject. Let's talk about Racketts. Did you know that his mother is living?"

"Why, yes, of course. I knew that weeks ago. Racketts and I are confidants," she said laughing. "He has told me all the story of his life, except how he got hurt, and the cause of the death of his baby sister. He avoided talking on those subjects, saying that only he and his mother talked together on them. He wept while he spoke, and I dried his eyes and comforted him with the assurance that I admired him much for his devotion to his mother. I infer that his father was a dissipated,

cruel man, who greatly abused his wife, and, perhaps, on some drunken occasion, inflicted the injury on Racketts from which he suffers. He had little to say about his father, and there was no word of love in what he did say. Poor, little cripple, he is all heroics. Did he talk to you of his mother? He is as full of devotion as a dervish at his shrine, and expresses his love for her in simple, eloquent tenderness, which few of larger growth and cultivation can command. But then, you remember you called him a—''

"Don't break the covenant," I screamed.

"I will not," she replied with a laugh as she started for the veranda.

CHAPTER VI.

"And once the young heart of a maiden is stolen,
the maiden herself will steal after it soon."

We have had ten days of ugly weather. There have been patches of sunshine alternating with copious showers. Grace has taken advantage of many of the little lulls in the storm. She has done the beach for a mile or more, and bathed several times. I have not ventured from the hotel. I learned from Racketts that she had been at the Hastings cottage each day. The little fellow wonders why I don't accompany her, and I could offer no excuse except the weather. She has not said a word to me as to what she discovered there. I must wait her pleasure. It will come bye and bye. I have observed that in coming from one of these visits she passes quietly to her room and lies down. This morning she told me that I would have to visit Miss McMillan oftener, remarking that she had not time. Last evening Mr. McMillan came from New York. He and Grace were together for an hour. When she came to her room, she appeared worried and dissatisfied. I fear their relations have been disturbed. When she met him on the veranda this morning, his salutation was more formal, and her recognition more dignified and reserved. He was courtly, but cold; she polite, but indifferent. I am sure his eyes are not talking as much as they were. Poor Grace,

what a lesson. I fear that there will ever remain a shadow in her heart—the ghost of an unrequited love. She is coming. I hear her footsteps.

"You are always writing. Do you never tire? That diary of yours will make a work as voluminous as an encyclopedia. What do you find to write about? Everything is so miserably stupid that I am at a loss to know of what you can possibly make a note that will be interesting."

"I do not lack material," I replied.

"Well, go on. Don't permit my presence to disturb you in your pretentious work. I promised to read it when we return to the city, but really you must absolve me. It is enough to bear the fearful stupidity of this place."

"Oh, the reading of it shall depend on your pleasure. Sit down. I do so want to talk to you. How is Miss McMillan?" I had not visited her for two days.

"Much better. Nearly as strong as you or I. She is fleshing up wonderfully, too, and has a voracious appetite. She does not eat, she devours."

"And her brother, how is he?"

"Well, I suppose, though I speak without advice."

"You were with him last evening?"

"Yes, for a few minutes," she carelessly replied.

"For an hour at least," I said.

"Was it so long? It did not seem so."

"Grace, I have been waiting for you to tell me of his visit to New York. Did he see your father?"

"Yes. He was not largely communicative and said but little. I fear father was in one of his moods. You know what they are. Mr. McMillan assured me that he was highly pleased with his interview, but, well, I would

rather he had not gone. No, I am not. I am glad he has met him."

She was toying with a tassel while she talked, and tapped a tattoo on the window pane.

"I observed that greetings between you this morning were not so cordial."

"Did you?" she replied with a smile. "You are growing quite observant."

"Come, Grace," taking her hand, "tell me what has occurred. You told me the day he left for New York that he inquired of you as to the disposition of your father, and that his eyes talked volumes. He has seen your father. What has caused the change in his manner?"

"Oh, it is nothing; it is merely a shadow passing and it will soon be gone."

"Is your father the shadow?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"From Mr. McMillan's manner when he met me. The tenderness was gone and in its stead dignified deference. However, he could not make his eyes tell falsehoods. They were as full of heart fire as when he went to New York. They spoke plainer than words that his manner was forced and unnatural. Were he to follow the promptings of his heart, he would never be out of my presence. I can imagine his interview with father. With measured sentences he told his love for me. Then, you can imagine father's surprise,"—and she burst into a hearty laugh. "I can guess what was his first thought. It reflected on you. 'Why has Rebecca permitted this?' Oh, he will hold you to a fearful accountability."

"Grace, you are the most wearing person that lives," I said, in half anger.

"It is all your fault, my dear old auntie. You know you should have had particular care of my heart, and prevented its getting lost." In another instant she was out of the room.

I sat down, weary and almost heart-sick, and gave myself up to moodiness. What excuse could I fashion for this disagreeable adventure? None. I had to acknowledge to myself that I was aware of every step of the road, and had failed to interpose an earnest or even a mild protest. I was as much in fault as Grace herself. Grace returned and instantly appreciating my dejection, said :

"Have no fears my good old dear. This is my battle and I will win it. The shadow will soon pass and eternal sunshine take its place. Father is investigating. He is on a scent of discovery, and in a short time he will have verified Mr. McMillan's character and worth, and then will come a benediction. Notwithstanding he approves, he will never cease scolding you for permitting me to have my own way. You should have sounded an alarm signal, and, as I take all your advice, I should have been saved."

"Grace, don't add to my suffering. I am really miserable."

"My dear aunt, don't feel hurt at my talk. It is all humor, but I will not indulge in it now. You had no more to do with bringing about this situation than had the man in the moon, and you were just as powerless to prevent it. I will take care of it. And now, I am tired of love and its affairs. We will talk of something else. Did you know I was out driving? Yes.

Had an elegant ride. The old fishermen, I met several of them while they were washing their nets, say that we are going to have a spell of beautiful weather, and that we will all be sighing for rain before another drop falls. So we may set ourselves down to the enjoyment of sand, water and sun."

"Where did you drive?" I asked in a mechanical manner more to relieve myself than for information.

"To the cottage," she answered.

"You mean to the home of the Hastings's?"

"Yes."

"What did you find there?"

"A woman, two children, and two men. One of the latter was a visitor, like myself. He lives at this hotel, and you no doubt have seen him frequently, as have I. By the bye, I have made the acquaintance of quite a number of people, and this, too, without your consent. That was not prudent I admit, but I must know these people with whom I am constantly coming in contact. One gentleman to whom I was introduced was forward enough to make particular inquiry about you, asked me who you were. I replied, 'She is Miss Propriety, of New York City, a most gracious and valued friend of mine.' I was not going to tell him you were my aunt. He would have immediately concluded that you antedated the hills. He expressed a wish to know you, and added that you were an adorable creature. If you will primp up nicely, I shall take pleasure in presenting him."

"Who is Mr. Impertinence?" I asked.

"Oh, he's a Mr. Morning-glory, or Mr. Sunflower, or Mr. Primrose, or some other flowery name, which for a moment has escaped my memory. You called my

attention to him a few days ago, as we were entering the dining hall. You remember that slim, long-legged, crop-haired fellow, whose presence was made known to you by a wave of perfume which swept from his carefully kept person, just as we were going to dinner?''

"Did you say that he made inquiry about me?''

"Yes, and further said that you were an adorable creature.''

"Grace, don't you dare to introduce that fool.''

"But you must know him. He is a curiosity and you can employ idle moments by permitting him to entertain you.''

"I will not know him. He makes me uncomfortable when I am compelled to pass him. His eyeglass is a horror to me, and he stares at me as if I were some strange beast.''

"Rather say an idol. He wants to worship you.''

"Grace, as you love me, spare me the imposition of an acquaintanceship. He's horrid.''

"My dear aunt,'' replied Grace, in ironical tones, "you are the very seat of prejudice. You have formed a dislike to this excellent person, merely because he ogles you through a single eyeglass. Did he use two, it is altogether probable he would not be offensive. He is dying to attest his adoration. Now, what good and sufficient reason have you for not giving him an opportunity? None. You must know him. You have such a happy faculty of making worthless things serve some good purpose, that I am sure you can make useful even that nonentity. Have you observed his mother? She is called an invalid, and takes great pleasure in setting forth all her ailings to the willing ears she meets. I have heard her 'tale of woe' and have concluded that

she is sick from indolence—nothing else is the matter with her. She is an ignorant bundle of absurdities, constantly doing or saying something which makes her ridiculous. I have really courted her for no other purpose than to enjoy her blunders. The son is the veriest noodle I have ever met. He is a pure type of mawkish inanity, and drawls and whines as though he were the care of the world. His mother dotes on him and he is the burden of all her talk. I am familiar with his life, as seen by his mother's eyes, from his boyhood to his present callow age. Even his infancy is familiar to me, for the old lady has told me of his odd pranks while drawing nourishment from the maternal fountain. To her he has been a wonder from his first breath, and were he to die the mother would not be satisfied unless old *terra firma* were to go into convulsions.''

''Grace, I do not wish to make the acquaintance of either,'' I said.

''But you must,'' she replied emphatically. ''You are the scribe of this trip, and it is necessary that you should be familiar, slightly, with these two people, that you may the better assign them their roles in the farce, or melodrama, or whatever it may be, that is daily played here. You are not only the scribe, but stage manager, and it is your duty to cast the players.''

''What are you talking about, Grace? You just rattle away in meaningless phrases until my brain is in a whirl.''

''Why, my dear, life everywhere, and under all circumstances, is a farce, a comedy, a drama or a tragedy. Our visit to the beach is one of its scenes, and as I have made up my mind to play leading lady, out of the motley crowd you must cast the rest of the characters.''

"Grace, stop your nonsense, and talk sense for a moment."

"I am not talking nonsense, but fact. There is another party to whom you shall be introduced. I have forgotten his name if I ever heard. Racketts calls him 'Uncle Tom,' and Mrs. Hastings speaks of him as the 'good old father.' He, too, is a character. I will not attempt to describe him other than to say that he is the opposite of the Primroses. That is the name of the delectable young man who adores you. Uncle Tom is in the ministry, in a local way. We will need a chaplain before the play closes, and he will do."

"For a wedding," I asked.

"No, for a death."

As she uttered these words her whole manner changed. A sigh, as if born of an ache, came from her breast, and without explanation she went to her room. I did not follow. Unconsciously I kept repeating, "For a death."

CHAPTER VII.

"Squeezing out sea water."

Yesterday afternoon we had a terrible thunderstorm. The morning was extremely warm and sultry. At noon a stiff blow came from the sea, which increased in violence each minute, until it was almost a tornado. Soon after five o'clock the waves were in their most portential power. They rolled in until the hotel was surrounded with water. The waves swept over the lower veranda and entered the doors of the first floor. They struck the sides of the building as if they were great hammers. The wildest alarm was created among the inmates. With but a few exceptions all the guests were intensely agitated. I was much excited, but kept my room so as not to make an "exhibition" of myself, as Grace would say. Once I was called from it. A maid of Mrs. Primrose urged me to visit Mrs. P——, and calm her if possible, lest she die of excitement. I found her lying upon a bed, greatly exhausted, and alarmed beyond description. Her son was at her side, a great booby, who added to his mother's distress by lamentations and upbraidings. He was affectionate and heartless at the same moment. Returning her embraces he chided her for bringing him to the coast where the nasty waves would drown him. As I entered, Mrs. Primrose exclaimed :

"Save him—save him, save my dear boy! Let me drown but save my dear boy." He turned his white simpering face to me and whined.

"Yes, I want to be saved. Have they got boats yet? They promised to take me away in a boat—to take me where there's land. Are all the people saved but me?"

I paid no attention to his whine, but turned to his mother and said:

"Mrs. Primrose, if there were serious danger at any time, it is gone. The wind has slackened and the waters are receding. No one has gone from the hotel."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed as she clasped her hands and raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"Is that true?" asked her son, first disengaging himself from his mother.

"Yes," I replied.

"Ma, get up. You worry me so. We needn't be afraid if the water is going back," he said, as he attempted to raise her head from the pillows.

As I was leaving the room he quit his mother and came to my side.

"You are sure that the water is going back?" he again asked.

"Yes, it is," I replied.

A mother's love is the blindest of passions, and it is well that it is. Were not some one blind to our faults and our weaknesses, we should be beyond pity.

Grace did not exhibit any alarm. Most of the time she was in company with Mr. McMillan. I presume that his assurance was the secret of her calm. They remained on the lower veranda until the advancing waters drove them to the second story. Occasionally

she came to my room to assure me that the danger was not imminent, and when the winds abated came to me to say that the waters would soon recede. Thus, I was enabled to comfort the Primroses. It was midnight when she came to her bed, and was asleep long before I was.

When morning came I was first up. She was sleeping soundly. She had darkened her room before retiring, and it was still night to her. The opening day was lovely, save the dampish appearance of the sands. The ocean's waves, in receding, left a slimish cast on them. There was not a cloud to be seen, and vision was lost to the east in water and sky. No sail was in sight, except mutton legs near the shore, and they were rocking on the still turbulent waves. The sea looked like a waste, and the ether an expanse of idleness. A buoy a mile out, tossed on the top of the waves as if it were at play. After breakfast Grace informed me that we would take a walk on the beach, and she thought it would do Miss McMillan good were she to accompany us. She ought to get clear occasionally of that stuffy room. The air this morning would operate like an elixir. She left me for Miss McMillan. In a few minutes she returned.

"I am provoked. I had Miss McMillan ready for a stroll, when her brother interfered, expressing the wish that she would not attempt it. The sands were too damp. That was enough. She begged me to excuse her."

"Grace," I replied, "her brother is the better judge. It is too damp for her to walk on the beach. The sand must be saturated to ooziness."

"I will not argue the matter. I know that it is not," she said. "I have spent half an hour testing it. The sand is as dry as powder. The Dynades would not have needed sieves could they have had this beach. Wind, and five hours of sunshine have taken the last drop of moisture out of it." "Come," she said, picking up some light wraps.

We were soon at the feet of the tide. The breeze was gentle and steady. The only evidence left of the storm was the agitated sea. The billows swept in and forward far beyond their accustomed lines, and broke against the sands in sharp cracks, as though they were torn, rather than broken. We stood in silence watching them waste their strength, when I asked:

"Grace, do you remember those lines by Alexander Smith, descriptive of the wedded sea and shore?"

"Of course I do. They were not intended for such a boisterous bridegroom as the sea is this morning. When Smith was inspired to his sweet thought, the waves were gently kissing the shore, and decking her tawny brow with shells. This morning the sea is an expiring fury, heaving its great billows, as though its heart were filled with unrest. There is no wooing in his embrace. His huge lips are pitiless. They lick the shore as the tiger does his prey. He has had a feast of blood, and the offerings he tenders to the shore this morning are pale, upturned faces, mangled human forms and wrecks of stout ships. How different the shore and the sea. The sea always restless, and at times furious. The shore patient, always the same, whether touched by gentle ripple, or beaten by the storm wave."

"I suppose that sigh you gave was sympathetic? Your imagination has given vital life to the old shell-

bestrewn thing, and you sigh as though the shore felt the lashings of the waves."

"Say rather, wreck-bestrewn. It was not for the shore I sighed, but for you. Had you a thought other than for yourself during the storm? You are as devoid of sentiment as an empty shell. You see nothing but the waves and shore. They will always be here, but where are they who went to sea in ships?"

"Grace, you are severe—cruel. You do not mean what you say. I did not think of myself when the storm was raging. When you were absent from my mind, my thoughts went out to them who were at the mercy of the elements. I thought of their peril, and the fury which hurried them to their doom—of the aching hearts that would wait in vain for the return of the loved ones. With my mind's eye I saw women at prayer—I saw widows and orphans and desolated homes."

"Oh stay, auntie dear, I was unkind. It was an impulse that spoke and not a thought. I know the depths and the virtue of your heart. It is always aglow with sympathy and melting with tenderness. Human suffering awakens its energies and human despair intensifies all its capabilities. You must pardon my rude, unfeeling speech."

"Well, Grace, I know you did not intend to wound, but you are terribly given to thoughtless utterance that is barbed, though it is not poisoned. Were I you, or rather were you I, there would be a careful guarding of that unruly member, the tongue."

"Hereafter, I will. Has this place any charm for you?"

"Only as your interests are involved," I replied.

"Then you are on an altar of sacrifice. We may leave it soon," she carelessly remarked.

"When," I asked.

"Oh, that will depend entirely on circumstances, to which all people are subjected. Sometimes I feel like quitting here instantly, and then, again, I think I could live here forever."

"Each day, Grace," I replied, "you are getting more difficult to understand."

"Of that, I am glad. If there are people I envy they are those who are called enigmas. To be read as if you were an open book is disgustingly unpleasant. I wish I were past finding out. However, I am utterly destitute of the art of concealment. I am full of blurts, and am constantly doing something or saying something which betrays that which I most desire should remain hidden. I cannot dissemble, and people read me with the ease they do a pica printed page. Why, even you, auntie, who make no pretention to acute acumen, read my innermost thoughts."

"There you are mistaken, my dear. On the contrary, as I just said, daily you are getting more difficult to comprehend. Would you like to return to the city?"

"No, I would not. I am waiting for something to occur," she replied.

"What something?"

"Any something."

She turned, as she closed her laconic reply, and went along the shore in the direction of the Hastings cottage. I would dearly love to know what takes her to that cottage so frequently. Have asked a number of times, and always get the same answer—"nothing." There is

something. She is a daily visitor, always in the morning hour, and not infrequently later in the day.

During that tedious spell of rain, she took advantage of each patch of sunshine to reach the cottage, often using a coupé. That quaint old man whom Racketts calls "Uncle Tom," is also a constant visitor. Grace found him there on her first visit, and they have grown quite intimate—it seems to me confidential. A number of times I have seen them isolated from all company, talking, "Uncle Tom" doing the most of it, and she the most patient and interested of listeners. In response to my inquiry "who he is," she replied, "He is a very good old body—an old Methodist—a type of those men who carried the doctrines of Wesley over the great west." She feared, however, that I was so "churchy" that I would not be able to appreciate him. Yesterday afternoon, just as the storm was entering on its furious humor, I went to where they were standing, to say to Grace that we had better go to our rooms. She was listening with devouring attention to a description he was giving of what he called the "early itinerancy." As he talked of the sufferings, privations, piety and triumphs of those he termed the pioneer preachers, my heart took on a glow that it had never felt before. He claimed inspiration for them—said they possessed the baptism of fire, and although they were rude, unlettered men, as were the fishermen of Galilee, they had God on their side, and therefore conquered wherever they went, subduing the heart of men while setting up the cross in every wooded slope, and altars at every fireside. As I led Grace away I saw that her eyes were suffused with tears. Reaching our rooms, I said:

"You find much delight in the company of Father

Tom, and I do not wonder at it. I don't know that I ever felt more comfortable religious sentiment than while listening to him."

"Why, of course, you never did. Just think for a moment of the poor crusts of the Bread of Life we receive at our pretentious altars; think of the formality with which they are given, and the utter absence of heart life in us who receive them. Then imagine 'Uncle Tom' administering. With your heart and soul in unison, he holds you up to the bleeding side of the Master, until you feel the water and the blood pouring onto and into you. I am so happy. God is so good, and my Savior is so tender and loving."

With a kiss she left me.

Uncle Tom is a strong character. In his mature manhood days he must have been a physical giant. He is over six feet now, though sixty years of age. He has large coarse features, which are softened by the most benignant expression. His mouth is wide, with the under lip partly covering the upper. I had passed him many times before last evening. There was always a respectful deference, but never so much as a bow. On the veranda, in the halls, sitting, standing or walking, when he is alone, he invariably hums through his nose. He seems to be burdened with but one air, "The Home of the Soul." Two weeks ago, when coming from bathing, we passed him. I called Grace's attention to the bee-like noise, at the same time making a slight comparison not entirely complimentary. She grew indignant in an instant, called me wicked, and hoped that no special providence, in wrath, would overtake me.

She did not go as far as the cottage, but returned to where she left me.

"I want you to go with me to the cottage."

I was busy with my own thoughts and did not answer her promptly.

"Did you hear me?" she asked.

"Yes. When? Now?"

"No, not now. I will tell you when. There is an angel in that cottage."

"Grace, I wish you would give up finding angels. You are constantly discovering them. I believe you know where there are half a dozen in New York City. I fear you will be over supplied one of these days. Besides, you seem to lose comfort when you discover one."

"It is well somebody is able to discover them. The world would be a wretched place without angels. Yet, they would not be here were it not for the wretchedness which is in the world. My dear Aunt Rebecca, you are one of the dumb-blind, and do not know an angel when it is face to face with you. It should be a matter of constant congratulation to you, that you have a niece who knows angels when she meets them. They are very scarce, my dear, and found only where the great multitude never go. 'Ye have them always with you.' They are of the lowly and sorrowful of this world and are possessed of those qualities which fit them for the eternal home to which death enters them."

She left my side and went to the water's edge, where she tried how near she could put her foot to the incoming wave without getting it wet. Thus, for a few moments, when she took her way to the cottage. I watched until she entered the path leading thereto, and then went to the hotel.

I do not believe that there is another woman in the world so peculiarly situated as I am. When I think of

Grace I am impressed with the importance of my life, and at the same time its utter insignificance. I have no individuality. My life is tangled up in hers. Born under the same roof, I have been an orphan since before she was born. Twelve years ago, her mother, my sister, died. We had been companions until this event. Then she became my charge. The slight difference in our ages, (I am twenty-four and she twenty-two) has seriously militated against me. Viewed in the light of Grace's existence, I should have been born ten years earlier. I can see no good reason for my borning having been put off so late. Why did I not get brother Phil's or Charley's place is a mystery to me, when I think of the duties imposed on my life. It would have suited them just as well to have been born six or nine years later. Sister Marie was a goose, else she would not have married at so early an age. She committed matrimony just as she turned her fifteenth year, and, that too, with the consent of the authors of her being, who, in most things, were set down as prudent, sensible, and very proper people. Good sense would have suggested that Marie gain womanhood before turning attention to matrimony. Her sixteenth birthday was made doubly memorable by the advent of the young lady who affects the pleasure of calling me her dear old aunt. I was not comprehensive enough to enjoy the event and was too busy with some teeth which were forcing themselves through my gums to enter into the joy of the occasion. I have an opinion that instead of rejoicing, I would have entered a protest against the intruder's first lung expansion. I learned early the superior relation I held to her, and endeavored to impress her mind with my importance. The endeavor has been the flattest of failures. As from the beginning,

so now, she rules, not I. But why should I be fault-finding? Poor, dear Marie, sweetest of sisters, dearest of mothers, fondest and truest of wives. O, inexorable death! And Grace, dear Grace, why should a thought linger with me against you? What would I have been without you? When I think of all, I am forced to the conclusion that my life would have been a waste, were it not for you. All the sweet contentment, all the unalloyed happiness was with you or for you. I love your little pouts and pets, and even your slight exhibitions of temper, or your unintentional sarcasm. She never, to my knowledge, has wittingly done a wrong, yet she is constantly doing something which my judgment condemns. Most frequently my condemnation is in error. The results prove that what I call her impulse is really intuition. She is never so handsome as when crossed in some of her intents. Her face was not made a playground for dimples, and her eyes are most beautiful when the arch is out of her brows. Her heart has wonderful capabilities. She abounds in sympathy and is constantly seeking some object that will awaken it. There is scarcely an hour in her life that is not pulsating with desire to relieve suffering. I have been of opinion that she would never marry. Some poor fellows have made persistent attempts to awaken a feeling warmer than that of friendship. All have failed. At last she has met her fate. George McMillan has dispelled all discussion. She loves him. Under her apparent indifference, there is a passion, fierce as a tempest. She has not spoken of her love for some days, and has forbidden me to mention it. She comes and goes as if it were forgotten. This wonderful mastery of self is the stoutest exhibition of the power wherewith

she controls all who come within her influence. She seems to act from intuition. What upon earth, could have suggested to her this out-of-the-way, almost desolate place? Yet, where could we have gone where so many incidents of most interesting character would have occurred? She never speaks of home, and seems to have determined to make this sandy beach her world for the season. We have not received any scratches of the pen since our arrival. Everybody is impatient for the mails except the young ladies who occupy numbers seven and nine, ocean front. She told me she instructed her father not to write unless some member of the family was dangerously ill, and she would not write home unless I was drowned. Nice conditions on which to rest a correspondence.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Blast such an infirmity."

It seems to me that Grace and I are the only persons here for pleasure. The rest are invalids—their escorts are nurses. Mr. Potts, the proprietor of the hotel, is a man of consequence. He has the most patronizing ways of anyone I ever met. Ignorant and pretentious, he moves about with owlish gravity, and expresses his views on all subjects with the emphatic earnestness and mysteriousness of an oracle. After dinner yesterday he honored me by seating himself in a chair at my side on the veranda. His personnel is grotesque. Grace says he looks like a demijohn. The best way to describe him is to say that he impresses you with the conviction that he is overfed. He has a very thick, short neck, with a big roll of fat lying at the base of his brain. His nose is thin, in contradiction to the rest of his make-up. The end of it sharp and the point dropped, so that, a short distance away, it looks as if a wart were attached to it. His lips are thick and ashy in color. Jaw long and heavy, reminding one of the weapon which Sampson used so effectively on the Philistines. Shaded by a pair of shaggy brows, are two ferret-like eyes. The lid of the left one must have some nervous affection, as every few seconds it partly closes, the movement so slow that a bad half-wink is made.

When I turned in response to his address, that left eye saluted me. I rose from my chair, indignant at the familiarity, when he quickly rose and said :

"It's an infirmity, Miss, a very serious affliction. That movement is neither a suggestion nor an insinuation. Yes, it has gotten me into lots of trouble, has that eye. Yes. There is scarcely a day that my wife does not receive a protest against my behavior. Yes. People don't wait for explanations. Yes. They just hurry away and keep boiling until they meet her. Yes. She explains, and harmony follows. Yes. That eye keeps me poor. I've spent thousands on scientific fellows, but all to no purpose. Yes. If anything, it gets a little worse after each operation. Yes. They made the movement a little slower, which is not desirable. Yes. I have ceased the scientific, and make my explanation, as I do now."

"I suppose it is annoying to you," I said, resuming my seat.

"Very. Not only to myself, but to her. Yes. Sarah assures me that she has the utmost confidence in me, but suggests that I keep out of the society of the ladies. Yes. Says it will save me explanations."

"Your wife is considerate. That is good advice," I remarked.

"Yes, very. Think it is backed by a little jealousy. Yes. There is no love without jealousy. Yes. Sarah loves me to distraction. Yes. That eye gives her a great deal of trouble. Yes. She pines about its performance and has proposed a remedy which I cannot possibly apply even to gratify the mother of my children. Yes. She wants me to wear a green blind over it. Yes. A green blind. It would disfigure

me. Yes. Can't do it, even to please Sarah. Yes. You observe I keep my hand over it while I converse. Yes. It got the start of me this morning, else I would have covered it before I spoke to you. Yes."

While he was talking there hobbled past on crutches a little dried-up old man who in his personnel is just the opposite of Mr. Potts. He is merely a shadow. His head, with its big, black, brilliant eyes, seems more than half of him. He is merely framework, which would bear lots of flesh, and nerves, and muscles, and blood. As he passed, he scowled at Potts, and I observed that his lips were moving, but I heard no words.

"Who is that?" I asked abruptly.

"Hard to handle. Yes, very hard to handle. Says he hates me, yes, but I know he loves me. Yes. Curses me and blesses me in the same breath. Yes. He must have a block to chop on. Yes. I'm his block. He was cursing me as he passed. Yes. Not loud, but deep. In a few minutes when I meet him, he will bless or curse me as his humor is. Yes. That wet spell some weeks ago was bad on him. Yes. Rheumatism from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Yes. Held me responsible for it. Yes. Pays his bills promptly. Yes. Never disputes, but pays. Yes. He's very prompt. When he paid his last bill he assaulted me by charging that I neglected him. Yes. Asked how. He replied that I never wanted to borrow from him. Yes. Was offended because I would not ask him for a loan. Yes. Says that the sharks are on me all the time, and that they will eat me up financially, and he'll be glad of it. Yes. Says I am a poor fool. That's Mr. Cowls, of Philadelphia."

"He is a great sufferer," I remarked, to lead Mr. Potts to further talk.

"Yes. In stormy wet weather. Yes. Bright days he is cheerful—very cheerful. Yes. Likes company, and is pleasant with everybody but me. Yes. But that's no annoyance. Yes. I understand him. Know him as if I had made him from the ground up. Yes. When he aches, he thinks I am in every joint. Yes. Tells me I am. Yes. Uses strong language then, but it is lost on me, because I coincide with his opinion. Yes. Says he will leave the hotel as soon as he is able. Yes. But he doesn't go. He stays."

"Who are the Primroses?" I inquired.

"They're strange. Yes. First season here. They're well supplied. Yes. Well supplied. Talk too much about their grandpas and grandmas. Yes. Think they're new to society. Were you at the hop the other night?"

"No, I was not."

"Then you didn't see the old lady when she glittered. Yes. Glittered—covered with diamonds. Yes. Blazed on her shoe buckles and on the pinnacle of her comb. Yes. Blazed all over. Yes. Looked as if she were a cousin to the stars. Yes. And that son was aglow with them. Yes. Worn awkwardly, that is true, and kept him busy getting the right light on them. Yes. That fellow is a catch, and there is a number of them after him. Yes. They'll land him."

"What use will they make of him after he is caught?" I asked.

"That's for them to devise. I should have said 'her.' Yes. Two can't have him. Yes. Of course not. Yes. A smart woman will manage him. Yes. She will make a wrapping string of him, and she will

wear him constantly on her finger. Yes. He's a catch. I say, he's a catch. Yes."

He discussed a number of others, but they were uninteresting, and so I grew tired and bade him good evening. The only people who have really attracted my attention, he did not speak of, nor did I ask. I have been waiting for Grace to discover who they are, but she is so absorbed with the McMillans, and Racketts, and the cottage people, that she has neglected to give them any attention. They are a distinguished looking couple, just middle age, unobtrusive, with elegant manners, and avoid society. The woman's face is very interesting. The expression is spiritual, intelligent, yet sad. Traces of suffering mark every line of it. He is dignified but not stiff, with a tinge of haughtiness in his manner. Courtly in movement, he has the gallantry of youth, and waits upon his wife more like a wooer than a husband. They seem made for each other. He is almost constantly at her side, whether walking or sitting. In the open air or in the hotel, she leans upon him. If he leaves her for a moment, which is but seldom, on his return he approaches with courtly and dignified consideration, amounting to veneration. I think Grace likes them, though she protests otherwise. A few days ago I asked her why she had not made their acquaintance. She replied, "I have an aversion to them. Besides, they do not rush against me. They are cold, proud people who are not conscious that there is any suffering in this world save their own. They suffer. Sleeping or waking, those two people suffer."

I think I can assign a better reason for her aversion than she gives. Grace has discovered that Mary Hastings loves the old lady, and each day spends hours in

her company. The sweet, little gray-eyed beauty is sharing her love. Grace would like to absorb all of it, except that which Mary gives her mother. The old doctor (I heard the clerk call him Doctor Kirkwood,) and his wife are never so happy, apparently, as when they have that child with them. At times he holds her on his knee, while again she is sitting on a rustic bench between them. Only yesterday they were thus situated, and the little one was asleep with her head resting on the breast of the lady. I observed Grace watching the three from her window. I am satisfied that she is not pleased with this diversion of the child's love.

CHAPTER IX

" The soul he held on earth."

Grace had a fit of talking on her this morning. She just rattled away, touching this topic and that with delicate embellishments of wit and humor, but really in a meaningless sort of way, so that she reminded me of the jolly fellow we met at the railway station, and who she said was not a human, but "a machine." She jumped from subject to subject with the ease of a school girl singing a familiar medley. All the while her mind seemed to be elsewhere than with her themes. It was a relief when Racketts with the gray-eyed sweetness, and the inseparable Major, presented themselves at the door of my room. As the children entered, Racketts turned to the dog and made a motion indicating that the presence of the Major was not agreeable and that he must wait in the hall.

"No," said Grace. "Bring him in."

"He is too wet," said Racketts. "There's a cat with which he has lots of fun, and he got after her and ran right under the water of the sprinkling cart, and he got soaked."

"Well, let him come," said Grace.

Racketts turned to the dog which had seated himself in the hall at his young master's bidding, and said :

"Shake yourself, good."

In an instant the little animal obeyed, giving himself a complete shaking, though there was but little water in his hair.

"Now come," said his master.

The dog was entering the room on all fours when Racketts extended his finger and in the kindliest voice said, "Don't forget your manners."

In an instant the Major was perpendicular. When he was near Grace he turned his eyes to Racketts, who nodded his head and said "Yes." The Major made a bow, then dropped to the use of his four legs.

We had a hearty laugh at the performance, when Grace said: "Racketts, why do you not call him 'rags.' He looks like a bunch of them."

"I never thought he looked like rags, but he does when he's wet," said Racketts, and then added, "But, when he's dry, he's very silky."

"Come here, Sunbeam," said Grace, motioning with her index finger to little Mary. "I am going to give you a new name this morning: You are always so sweet and bright and good, that I am going to call you "Sunbeam." You will not forget your new name?"

"No, Miss Grace, I'll remember it."

"What did I say it was?"

"Sunbeam," replied the child.

"Is we all to call her that?" asked Racketts.

"Yes, we is all to call her Sunbeam," replied Grace with a laugh. "Racketts, you must not forget."

"I won't, Miss. That's what she is. Nobody ever thought of that afore you. It just suits."

"What is your name?" asked Grace, appealing to the child.

"Sunbeam," answered the little one.

"Come here and kiss me. You shall have a big wax doll that shuts its eyes when it goes to sleep, I will send to the city for it immediately."

"Oh, that will be hunkie," chimed in Racketts. "She has a rag baby now, haven't you?"

"Yes, but it has been very sick," replied Sunbeam, "and I guess it will die."

"Of course it will die," said Grace, as she picked up Sunbeam and carried her into her own room, closing the door, which she has done almost daily.

When alone with Racketts, I asked, "Who is the old man you call 'Uncle Tom?'"

"Why, don't you know him? Why, that's Uncle Tom. I thought everybody knowed him."

"Uncle Tom who or what? What is his last name?" I asked with some impatience.

"Uncle Tom McElroy. He was here last year when I was here. I knowed him then. He is very good to us all—the poor. 'Sit down, Major,' he said to his dog, that kept licking his hand. 'He wants to show off, Miss Rebecca, that's his way of telling he wants to perform."

"Can he do many things?" I asked.

"Yes, Miss, he's a regular show."

"Well, make him perform. I want to see his tricks."

"He does it better when she sees him," pointing to Grace's room.

"Has he performed for Miss Grace?" I asked.

"No, I doesn't mean her. I means Sunbeam. It makes the Major so glad to see her clap her hands and laugh."

"Grace, come and bring Sunbeam," I called. "The Major is going to perform."

"Let us go quick," I heard the child say, and in a moment they returned. Racketts stepped to the center of the room, and the Major, as if conscious of all that had been said, took position in front of his master.

"How does a poor little dog do when a big dog bites him on the hind leg?" asked Racketts.

The Major hopped around on three legs and cried "Ki, I, Ki, I."

"How do little babies crawl before they walk?"

The Major bent his knees and crawled on the floor.

Racketts picked up a newspaper. The moment he touched it the Major threw himself on his haunches and extended his paws, apparently reaching for the paper. Racketts placed it between his paws and then said:

"Read us the news of the awful killing of a man and his wife, and their seven little orphan children."

The dog looked intently at the paper, changing its position several times. "He's looking for that particular piece. Pieces are sometimes hard to find when you don't remember exactly where you saw them."

At last the Major found it. He commenced little short growls, all the while keeping his eyes on the newspaper.

"Oh, that's the performance takes my mother. When mother is sitting at home, all alone and sad-like, he, without, being told, picks up a piece of paper and goes right in front of her, and reads about that awful murder. Then mother laughs, and he jumps and barks just as if he knowed he made her happy."

The performance was continued for some time to our great amusement. He made a soldier of him with a

stick for a gun, wounded him in battle and made him die on the field, all the while explaining the scene. Played the beggar, holding the boy's hat between his paws and taking out the pennies with his mouth, as fast as Racketts dropped them in, so as to keep the hat empty, in true beggar style; went out and rapped at the door, and when opened, entered in an erect attitude, and bowed to each one in the room, looking as serious as if he had been scolded.

"What is the matter?" asked Grace.

"Nothing. He is now going to do his last act. Major, show us how you always pray with mother and me."

The dog dropped on his knees, and Sunbeam slipped from the lap of Grace and went to the side of Racketts, when both kneeled. The little dog slowly bent his knees, threw up his head and closed his eyes, as were those of the children. He then uttered a low whine, so full of pity that it crept into my heart like a wail. He repeated it several times until Racketts said "Amen," when the three arose from their knees. It was wonderfully real. Grace had turned her head and I felt my eyes growing watery.

"We always say our prayers at night before going to bed, all of us," said Sunbeam.

"He learned that hisself," said Racketts. "Just took to it, cause he knowed we all had to starve to death."

"Starve to death," repeated Grace. "Come to me," she continued as she seated herself on the lounge.

When the crippled boy reached her side, she drew him down to her and said:

"Tell me about your starving."

"We was living in a shanty by the wharf, and we had nothing to eat all day, for two days, and it was night and it was stormin', and blowin', and rainin', and thunderin' and lightenin', and it was cold, for it was in April and the fire had gone out the day afore, 'cause we had no wood or coal, an' I was sick an' couldn't go out an' gather chips an' bark, an' we was goin' to bed, an' mother an' me got down on our knees by a chair and commenced to pray, and I said, "Oh, God, listen to the Major. Oh, God, hear the poor, little dog," and mother's head fell down on the chair, an' she cried so easy an' said she was happy, an' she picked the Major up an' held him agin her breast, an' said "God did hear him; an' will answer him;" an' then we got up, an' there stood a man, an' he was cryin'. The storm was so noisy we didn't hear him open the door, but we wasn't afraid of him, 'cause the Major didn't bark, an' he was all wet an' muddy, an' he was drunk. Mother told him to sit down, an' he did; an' all he could say was 'God pity me,' and mother told him God did, and that God loved him, an' then mother an' the Major an' me kneeled down agin, an' prayed for the man, and all the time he cried, 'God pity me.' Then we made him a bed on the floor, an' he staid there all night an' in the mornin' he gave mother money, and kissed her hand an' said she had saved him. Next day he came back, an' told mother he wanted us to move, an' he took us away up town, an' put us in a nice little house, an' we have no rent to pay, an' he comes to see us often, an' brings a sweet lady with two little girls with him, an' they always kiss mother an' say, 'God, bless you,' an' mother says God does, an' that's the way we was starvin', an' how the Major learned to pray."

"Yes, and God heard him," said Grace, addressing me, in a sobbing voice, as though I was about to dispute the fact.

"Why should He not," I answered.

"Of course He does," said Racketts.

"Yes, indeed, He does," said Sunbeam. "God tells me that He does, doesn't He, Racketts?"

"Yes, He tells all of us—you and mother and me," replied the boy.

"Yes, He tells me too," added Grace.

Grace seemed determined that I should dispute the proposition, but I dropped all equivocal language and said, "Yes, I believe that the Major's prayer was answered."

That seemed to satisfy Grace, so she turned to the Major and gave him a sweet talk. The dog seemed to understand every word that was said, and Racketts said that he "knowed every word." "I'm so sorry he can't talk. What a great dog he would be if he could, wouldn't he," said Racketts.

"Yes," said Grace, "but he is a great dog as he is. Racketts, I do not wonder that you fled from the city to keep him out of the clutches of the cruel law, and the still more cruel men who execute it."

"Oh, yes, I had to bring him away. He never followed me in the city, but the 'catchers' would go to the house and steal him. They did do it," said Racketts with anger in his tone.

As usual, Grace picked up the fair, gray eyes and went into her room where she remained a few minutes. Returning, she kissed the children and patted the Major's head, as she sent them home.

CHAPTER X.

"They are purified who suffer."

I made a regular canvass of the hotel this morning. Walked in all the halls, porches and verandas. Inadvertently peeped into open doors and took sly glances at strange faces. I do not believe that women have more curiosity than men, yet they receive credit for possessing a superabundance of it. I am forced to confess that I have my share, particularly when I am doing a season. Though I am not real rude or offensively inquisitive, I find much difficulty in passing an open door without looking in. Grace says she can, and I verily believe that if there is a woman who does, it is she. When I leave my door open neither man nor woman passes without coming to an almost imperceptible pause. Mrs. Primrose in passing mine yesterday, cleared her throat as if to attract my attention. I did not turn around, though it is more than probable that I should have done so, had it not been that I had a full view of her in my mirror. I met her this morning on the veranda. She held out her hand and thanked me for my kindness the night of the storm. She was also kind enough to inform me that I had attracted her attention immediately on my arrival, and that she had been waiting suitable opportunity to make my acquaintance. She also expressed her regret that her son was not present, as he was very anxious to tell how com-

forting I had been to him when I assured him that the water was receding. She was very anxious that I should meet him, but could not be specific as to when he would be abroad, as he was suffering from shattered nerves, the result of his fearful fright. He was unable to get more than six hours sleep, and he needed ten each night. Consequently he was confined to his room, and the physician said he must remain there for some days to come. I got the dose of "My Son" of which Grace spoke. Poor, old mother! She dotes on that nonenity and injects him into every variety of conversation. I was surfeited, yet was compelled to listen until I observed Grace making preparations to leave the hotel, when I excused myself and hurried from her presence.

"I'm so glad you put in an appearance. The old lady was dosing me with 'My Son,'" I said.

"You should feel honored. They are after you. You will have to accept your destiny. Cease fighting against it, my dear aunt. She will make you a most excellent mother-in-law," she replied.

"Grace, I beg you refrain from your silliness."

"You should give her your ears frequently. Sound her to the very depths. Learn his peculiarities, his likes and dislikes, and those particular things which feed his vanity or his stomach. The path will then be made smooth," she replied with a half side-look.

"Grace, I beg you cease. I do not want to reply in kind, though I could."

"You have a rival in Flora McMillan. She is determined to impress him with her charms. Last night when Mrs. Primrose discovered Flora was in the parlor, she went hurriedly to her rooms and brought 'My Son' in."

"She told me he was confined to his room since the storm, suffering from shattered nerves," I remarked.

"Presumably, he is, but when he can be brought into the presence of Flora, his nerves grow steady. You should have been there. He waited upon her like a page. You must be alert or you will lose the prize."

"You do not seem to recognize how slight the difference is between raillery and insincerity. Miss McMillan is welcome to what Mr. Potts calls 'the catch.'"

At this moment George McMillan came, and I left them.

I am constantly interrupting myself. I was doing the halls and verandas, and I continued. I met Mr. Cowls on his crutches. He was leaning against a pillar and looking seaward. As I neared him he gave me a most gracious salutation, and his face wore such a benignant expression that I stopped and held out my hand. He almost dropped his crutches as he reached for it.

"Your obedient servant, Miss. I hope your health is such as to enable you to enjoy fully this lovely morning," he said.

"Thank you. My health is excellent, and the morning indeed lovely."

Mr. Cowls was very pleasant and very interesting. Was not then suffering from his rheumatism, yet was compelled to use his crutches, lest he, in an unguarded moment, might fall. I was not only entertained but surprised at the fluency of his speech and the elegance of his expression. As I left him, he thanked me for my courtesy, and assured me that I had greatly added to the pleasures of the morning.

I finished my grand round, and was passing through

the hotel office when my attention was attracted by loud talk. Mr. Potts was behind the counter and Mr. Cowls leaning against it, shaking one of his crutches at Mr. Potts, while the latter was repeating the word "yes," "yes."

"Say No," said Mr. Cowls.

"Yes," replied Potts.

Then followed an adjective or two descriptive of Potts' general and particular chraacteristics. The only reply made by Potts was a more rapid movement of the lid of his left eye. Mr. Cowls turned, and seeing me, he threw the crutch he was brandishing, under his arm, and addressed me:

"He is the most absolutely contrary man I ever met. He will say 'yes' when he means 'no,' and 'no' when he means 'yes.' Everybody abhors him—his wife abhors him."

"Yes," said Potts.

"What did I tell you? He means 'no,' for she dotes on him. He would be a miscreant if he could truthfully say 'yes.' A man abhorred by his wife—a true woman as is Mrs. Potts—would be a miscreant."

"No," said Potts.

"What did I tell you? I can't stand him. I must get out of his sight."

"Stay with me," said Potts, as Mr. Cowls hobbled away as fast as his crutches could carry him.

"Very hard to handle. Yes. As I before remarked to you. Yes. But I know how to humor him. Yes. He must have a block to chop on, and I'm the block. Yes. I am at his service. Does him good. Does me no hurt. Yes. I know his humors, yes, and gratify them. Yes. Human nature is a great study, Miss.

Have made it one all my life. Yes. Read men as you do books. Yes. Know what Cowls is thinking about when I look into his face. Yes. He is happy now that he has had his spat. Yes. He has been worried for two hours. Yes. I have been avoiding him, and his gall hurts him. Yes. It's not all out of him yet. Yes. You see you interrupted the play. Yes. Won't sleep well until he has entirely delivered himself. Yes. Very hard to handle, but I understand him. Yes."

I bowed to Potts without assenting to his criticism of Mr. Cowls. Grace was waiting for me and suggested a walk on the beach. Just as we were leaving the hotel, I called her attention to Dr. Kirkwood and his wife, seated at the end of the veranda, with Sunbeam between them. She paused a few moments and looked at them. I broke the silence by remarking—

"I would like to know those people."

"I would not," she replied.

"Grace, I think you are feigning that dislike. They are desirable people, otherwise Sunbeam and Racketts would not be in love with them."

"How do you know that the children love them?" she asked.

"The child told me. Says she loves them both, and Racketts seconds her. I partly know them, though I have not spoken to either. In a talk I had with Mr. Cowls this morning, he spoke of them in most commendatory language. I can give you some news. Mr. Cowls told me Mrs. Kirkwood is only happy when Sunbeam is with her—that, unaccountably to herself, she loves the child dearly and wants her with her constantly, but at times is willing to sacrifice her

pleasure that Sunbeam may be with us. You have imposed upon me the task of casting the play (as you call this outing) and I want to know what part those people will best suit."

"Make them the audience," she replied. "They seem like people who think that the world is their oyster. Were they to select their part, rest assured they would choose to be in the principal and most elegant box. Put them there. But come, we are losing time. The beach is the place this morning."

She ceased talking and I did not break the silence. Occasionally she stopped and, stooping, she examined the tiny shells which covered the sand. Then she would pause and look out on the wrinkled face of the ocean as though lost in dreaminess. When we reached the rocky point she said:

"We are far enough."

At this point the waves had a fuller sweep than where they wasted themselves on the sands, and they beat the rocks with almost malignant violence. She stretched out her hands as if to invite them to greater force, and repeated,

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead,
Will never come back to me."

CHAPTER XI.

"The doll dressmaker."

I have just returned from a visit to Miss McMillan. Sitting in the hall in front of her door, I found the Major. There was a wag of his tail and a look of recognition, and in response I said, "Well, Major, you here? Where's the rest?" Entering I found Miss McMillan and Sunbeam, the former busy fitting a dress on a wax doll, and the latter looking on with delighted eyes.

"Grace's purchase," said Miss McMillan. "She sent to New York for it. It is just lovely," holding it at arm's length.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Sunbeam before I had time to answer.

"It is, indeed," I replied. "All dolls are lovely. I have much the same feeling for them that I had in girlhood. I never see one that I do not feel like taking it in my arms and lullabying it to sleep."

"I too," said Miss McMillan. "I have hushed this one to sleep a dozen times within forty-eight hours. When I cannot get any part of its dress to fit, I talk to it, scold, and move its limbs just as I did in childhood. Sunbeam has been pleading with me not to scold it, but, indeed, it needs worse than a scolding—it should be spanked. Nothing has saved it but the pleadings of Sunbeam, yet I fear I shall have to punish this doll

before I have completed her trousseau. Sunbeam knows what fearful trouble I have had. Don't you, dear?''

''Yes, it has given you a great deal of trouble, but I think it would do better if you did not scold it. You hurt its feelings and then it wants to do as it pleases. Don't it, Miss Rebecca?'' She looked pleadingly at me for support.

''Yes, Miss Flora, Sunbeam is right,'' I said. ''Dolls always get naughty if you hurt their feelings.''

''Yes, indeed, they do,'' chimed in the little one. ''Why, even my rag baby pouts when I scold her.''

''Well, I will not scold any more. Its trousseau will soon be complete. I have been busy for three days making chemises, pantalets, dresses, bonnets, etc., etc., and that too, under a pledge of secrecy, that Sunbeam might be surprised, but Grace will be disappointed. The little one has been here for hours at a time, and is familiar with every garment and adornment I have made. I don't believe in surprises. The child has had three days of enjoyment which she would not have had. Sunbeam, show Miss Duncan that beautiful pair of pantalets,'' said Flora with a smile to me.

In a moment Sunbeam had opened a drawer and out came a doll's fashionable wardrobe. As she delicately handled each article, she called my attention to its beauty, until she came to the pantalets. These she laid across her little arm, and looking up into my face, said:

''Aren't they lovely—perfectly lovely?''

''They are, very.'' They were trimmed with a costly lace, and I am sure Miss Flora furnished it, as we have none of that style in our family, and it could not be purchased short of New York, if there.

"Sunbeam says that dolls are always good," remarked Miss Flora.

"Is that so, Sunbeam? Are they always good?" I asked.

"Yes, Miss Rebecca, unless their mother is bad. I had such a lovely doll when I lived in the big city, but it hadn't such nice clothes as these. It had only one dress and that it got at the 'Fair' where it was born. It couldn't cry like this one, and I'm sure it was always good, only when I was bad. Then it was bad too and I had to punish it. It wanted to go to bed nearly every night wearing its dress and it gave me a good deal of trouble. I called it Mary Kolba. But it was smart, and it would argue back at me, until I silenced it by a good scolding. Sometimes I had to cry with grief."

We could not help laughing at the earnestness of Sunbeam, and as she closed, Flora laid down the doll and picked up Sunbeam. As she gathered her in her arms, Flora said:

"Tell me whom you love best."

"Mamma."

"Who next?"

"Mrs. Kirkwood."

"Who?" exclaimed Flora.

"Mrs. Kirkwood," I answered for the child. "The old doctor's wife."

"Do you love her next to your mother?"

"Yes," replied the child.

"Well, who next?"

"Miss Grace."

"And then who?"

"You, and you next, Miss Rebecca."

"Why do you love Mrs. Kirkwood next to your mother?" asked Flora.

"Because I do," replied the child.

"How about your father?"

"Oh, I love him bestest of all. I love him more than I can reach. Papa is so sick," and her little eyes filled with tears.

"Everybody loves Grace," said Flora. "I can scarcely tell whether she is first or second in my own heart. I so mix her up with what is first that she becomes a part of it."

"Where is Racketts?" I inquired, anxious to change the conversation, as it was tending to a subject on which I had to be dumb. "I saw the Major at the door as I entered."

"The Major at the door? Why did you not bring him in? He has missed Racketts," said Miss McMillan.

"No, Miss Flora, he always waits for me. Racketts tells him to stay, and he always stays," said Sunbeam.

"Open the door and let him in. He's one of us," said Flora.

As the child did so, the Major reared up and commenced pawing the air. When told to come in, instead of dropping on all fours, he kept his upright position, hopping into the room and dancing around the child as she brought him to where we were seated.

"Let him see the doll, Miss Flora," said Sunbeam.

"There, Mister Major, what do you think of that young lady?" said Flora, holding the doll in front of the dog. The Major shot our his tongue so quickly that Flora jumped to prevent him from licking its face.

"He won't hurt it. He only wants to kiss it. He often kisses me before I know it. He steals them," said Sunbeam.

"If that little dog does not reason, I would like to know what power he uses. It is far beyond instinct. His intelligence is of a much higher order. To my mind, it is reason. If he can reason, has he a soul? Is the soul and power of thought the same? Do you think, Flora, that Major ever has the heartache?" I asked.

"Of course he has. But you are treading on dangerous ground. Let us return to orthodoxy. Dogs have no souls. There is an end of it," she said with a laugh.

I spent an hour with Miss McMillan. The real object of my visit was to meet her brother. I wanted to look into his face to see if it was telltale. Just as I was going, I said:

"Your improvement is wonderful. Were you ever in such perfect flesh? It seems to me that you have been newly made. Is your brother fishing this morning?"

"I do not know. Where is Grace?"

"I think she is at the cottage. She told me that she had much to attend to this morning, and would not be home until near the noon hour."

"Perhaps my brother is there. Have you ever visited the Hastings'?"

"No, Grace has promised to take me with her, but I guess it is not opportune," I replied.

CHAPTER XII.

"An indefinite letter."

The improvement in Miss McMillan's health is amazing. I can scarcely realize that she is the same person we met when coming to the beach. Her flesh has the most delicate tint I have ever seen. Good-spirited when a sufferer, she is now bubbling over with animation and mischief. She is wickedly bent on having a flirtation with Mr. Primrose, and that young gentleman is eager for her assaults. Well, he has not enough heart to get seriously wounded, and no harm will follow. Mr. Primrose has ceased to eye me, for which I may thank Miss Flora. I met the mother and son this morning on the veranda. I received recognition, very slight, however, from the mother. As I passed he turned his head toward me, and while he looked the eyeglass dropped, I infer that was intended as a cut. He is no longer interested in me, and of course I am no longer an "adorable creature." What fearful disappointments come to us.

"Here is a letter from father," said Grace, bustling into the room.

"To you?" I asked.

"No, to you. Open it quickly and let me know its contents," she said.

It was brief. Not a word about Grace or Mr. McMillan, only a slight hint. He said, "I fear you

have neglected your charge. I will be at the beach soon." Handing Grace my letter, I asked :

"Where is yours?"

"Mine?" she replied, in apparent surprise.

"Yes, yours. Your father says he wrote you."

She stood in silence a moment, then handed me hers. It was more definite. Stated that he had been startled by Mr. McMillan's request. It was so sudden. The time was so short that he doubted whether they understood each other fully. He had made inquiry about Mr. McMillan and was entirely satisfied.

"Do you know whether he has written to Mr. McMillan?" I asked.

"Yes, he has written to him. Mr. McMillan did not refer to the subject."

"Then how do you know he has received a letter?"

"A bird commenced singing in my heart an hour ago, which tells me so."

"Where were you when the bird began to sing?"

"With George McMillan. He met me as I came from the cottage. His eyes were all ablaze with talk, while his tenderness of word and manner crept into my heart like incense. When we parted, I walked directly to the hotel office and received the letters."

"Grace, listen to me. Did George McMillan tell you he had heard from your father?"

"Why, auntie, of course he did—with his eyes. Have I not told you so? He did not tell me with his tongue, nor was it necessary. One of these days, Aunt Rebecca, you will be able to understand 'eyes talk.' At present it is a dumb thing to you. I do not believe he will ever make a cold, plain, matter-of-fact declaration to

me. He will leave the exquisite pain which is born of uncertainty, to be dispelled at the altar."

"Grace, dear, I believe as you, and I too am happy, very, very happy."

She threw herself into my arms. I could feel her heart throbs. While I was pressing her to my breast, a rap came at the door. Before I could release Grace and remove her to her own room, in bounded Flora McMillan.

In an instant they were in each others arms. I went into Grace's room leaving them alone, where I indulged in a little cry of my own. What was said I do not know, as I closed the communicating door, but several times I heard Flora say "Sister, my dear sister." The only response to this was sobs. Suddenly I began to realize that I had lost something that was necessary to my own happiness. I threw myself on Grace's bed, and ached and sighed myself to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Sympathy, the silver link, the silken tie."

I have been to the cottage. It is not a cottage as we understand when we speak of a seaside home. That idea carries with it splendor, elegance, ease, architectural beauty and interior adornments which taste and means can express, all encased in wide-spreading lawn and attractive surroundings. It is not such a cottage. These elegant homes are for the rich, the fashionable, the pretentious, and not infrequently the miserable. It is a plain story-and-a-half frame, with one story backbuilding, the latter answering for the kitchen and laundry. It is surrounded by a thicket of cedars so dense that the top of the house only can be seen from the roadway. There is a small yard in front, and this is cut up into beds, which are filled with flowers, not perfect in their maturity, for the reason that only the noonday sun reaches them. Honeysuckles and a rose clamber over the framework of the front and sides, while an ivy has taken possession of the rear, almost hiding the gable from view, and clothing it in living green. The lower front window is nearly hidden by a rare honeysuckle which has reached up into the air until it secured abundant sunshine. A rich perfume in which different odors vie for supremacy weights the air. With each breath the wealth of the flowers is inhaled On entering, the eye is shocked on the barrenness, and at the same time

charmed with the cleanliness presented. There is an echo to your footfalls. No carpet on the floors, nor pictures on the walls, except three small photographs which are old and faded. One, that of a lady, haunts me. I am sure that I have seen the original, but when or where I cannot remember. The face is linked to my childhood, as someone who knew me well and loved me. But who is it? I startled myself an hour ago by dragging it from the long past and connecting it with the immediate present. But, no, that cannot be. Yet, the thought pained me, and so contravenes all existing conditions that I must dismiss it from my mind. I will not mention it to Grace, but let it die where it was born.

In the room a single chair constituted the furniture. On it were lying a well thumbed bible and a Methodist collection of hymns. Their condition indicated constant use. Grace led the way into the rear room, and, apparently forgetting I was with her, walked straight, and without the least ceremony, to the side of a bed. That scene will be forever indelibly impressed on my mind. My heart ached for hours afterward, and even as I write there is a pain in it that almost chokes me. On the bed lay a dying man. There was nothing left but the semblance—bones thinly covered with skin, but destitute of flesh. That was all. No, not all. There were eyes there—great large lustrous, sunken eyes, in which the soul had housed itself. As I looked, I could see nothing but the eyes. Death had possession of all the rest of the body. The eyes spoke volumes. They talked as no tongue could speak. They spoke of life and death—of long suffering and present patience—of love and grief—of sorrow and hope. As I gazed, the eyes seemed to light up the face, and one by one the wasted features

stood strongly out—the sunken cheeks, the pale wide brow, the thin sharp nose, long jaw, and pointed chin. There was no grossness; and resignation rested upon it in infinite calm.

I was neglected. Grace drew a chair and seating herself at the bedside, reached for the emaciated hand which rested on his breast and said:

"How do you feel this morning?"

"Patient and resigned, but hurrying on. The end will soon be here," faintly replied the dying man.

"Are you lonely now, as when we first met you?" she asked.

"Oh no. He is with me constantly. He holds my hand as you do now, and I abide with confidence in His will."

"I am so glad," responded Grace.

"Yes, I know that He is with me. All dread, and fear and darkness have given way to confidence, courage, light and peace. Mary (that is the name of his wife) and I had a long talk this morning, until I became exhausted, but it was so comforting I forced myself to continue it. Poor, dear heart! It is a greater struggle for her than for me. She is constantly praying that I may remain with her. This morning she recognized the inevitable, and in tears and sighs she is imploring for resignation. He will send it to her. Speak to her that she may be comforted and strengthened for the last scene of all. God, I am sure, will hear you. In His love and mercy He will give her strength. But you can help her as you have helped me. I am resigned, and patiently waiting the summons of the Master. Death has no terrors, while faith lifts me into the very presence

of God. Let me rest a few moments. I want to say more."

He rested while Grace fanned him, and I looked with silence and awe into his face.

"She, poor heart, cannot believe that if I were gone, she would be greatly relieved—nay, more, strengthened for duties and responsibilities. Life to her now is a great burden, under which she will sink if she is compelled to bear it long. The cross is too heavy for her. No, I must not think so. He is too kind and too loving to crush. He will give her strength and enable her to labor all the day, and watch and administer all the night. The care of the children is great. Little Robbie is so young, and though good, is troublesome, while little Mary, Sunbeam, as you call her, though wise beyond her years, is still a child. It will be better when I am gone, both for them and for me. The dread of leaving them has gone. I am full of trust now. They are the sparrows' fall and He will notice them."

He ceased, apparently exhausted. I have never been so affected. My heart throbbed and jumped as if it would escape from the pain which filled it. Poor, wasted, dying man. Leaving wife and chicks, which had grown out of and into his heart. Lying on the invisible line between life and death, and conscious that the latter would mark the line with unalterable distinctness, he finds consolation in the provisions which had their birth in the agony of Calvary. Yes, there has come to him the sweetest assurances of eternal life to himself, and protection to those he leaves behind him. Resting on a faith which knows no fear, his confidence becomes boundless and limitless as God's love. I pray God that when I

come to the gate of death I may be resting upon the same rock.

Grace motioned for me to leave the room, and I passed into the hall and thence into the kitchen, where I found the poor wife and mother busy at her labor. I felt awkward in going into her presence in such an unceremonious manner. I was relieved on recognizing Racketts at the farther end of the room, clapping some semi-dried laces in his hands. On seeing me he turned to Mrs. Hastings, saying:

"Why, it is Miss Rebecca."

"Yes, madam, Miss Grace's aunt," I remarked, as she paused for a moment and looked at me through her tears, for she was weeping. She pointed to a seat without speaking. I refrained from talking until she recovered from her emotion. Lying asleep on the floor near Racketts was a two year old boy, no doubt the "Robbie" of whom the dying man spake. The rear door opened and Sunbeam entered. Observing me she came quickly to my side and held up her sweet little mouth for a kiss.

"Where is she?" she asked.

"Miss Grace, you mean?"

"Yes."

"In the room with your papa," I replied. She slid from my knee and went to Grace.

In a few moments Mrs. Hastings turned to me and said:

"It will not be long until I will be alone."

My heart was in my throat in an instant. I could not answer. I am such a poor excuse when I am most needed. What she said was so true. Grace could have answered and comforted her too, but I had to remain dumb. What desolation there is in that word "alone."

When she uttered it, it fell into my heart like a stone. What must be its weight in hers, I thought. I sat in silence with my head bowed. I was busy with comparisons—her lot and mine. In vain I tried to adjust the order of things. I observed her stop her work and closely examined the delicate garment she was washing, looking apparently at a name. She paused so long and looked so intently, that I said:

"What attracts your attention?"

"Only a name." "Only a name."

She uttered the last with quite a pause between each word, as though her mind were absent or completely absorbed. She made no further answer. It would have been rude in me to have inquired further, and so I sat in silence. My mind reverted to the dying man, and with him to the picture of desolation embodied in the word "alone." Inaudibly I kept repeating "alone," "alone." Racketts interrupted my thoughts by coming over and expressing his joy that I had come to the cottage, and the hope that I would come every day. When he returned to his work, I sat there dumb, not able to say one word. I could only watch her tears and listen to her sighs. She could not be older than I, and yet she is wife and mother, and will soon be widow. She is tall and fair, gray-eyed and golden haired—is beautiful, and must have been superbly so before she was compelled to hourly walk with sorrow. I may be mistaken as to the color of her eyes. I say they are gray because they are all light. Tears do not redden them as they do mine. They only wash them, making them brighter and fuller. I really believe that Grace does know angels. That side glance startled me. The faded photograph on the wall jumped into the scene. Her side face is as familiar to

me as though I were walking with it daily. She is not like Grace, nor like Sunbeam. It is someone else of whom she reminds me, away back in girlhood. But who? After minutes of silence I said:

"Your labors are severe."

"Yes, in my present condition. I am but illy able to work, and at best can do but little. Were it not for Racketts, and Joe, who helps him, I should be compelled to give up. Racketts does most of the hard work."

Racketts smiled as he said:

"Why, indeed, Miss Rebecca, it aint no work at all. And then Joe, who blacks the boots, he can do jist anything. It's nothin' but playin', an' Joe says so too."

"Before he took to his bed, I got along very well, but now I am largely dependent on Racketts," she remarked.

"Yes, but Mamie, Sunbeam I mean, helps me. Besides the Major is always along to make it cheerful," said Racketts.

"Your lot is a very hard one," I said, "and I do not see how you bear your burden."

"I am feeling better to-day than I have for many days. I am more resigned. Yesterday, Miss Grace and he and I had a sweet talk together. He was so comforted, and resigned, and I too, partook of his feelings. I am stronger to-day, and notwithstanding my sorrow, my heart is filled with strength and assurance. Yes, stronger than I have been for months. I was constantly repining and at times quarreling with God. In that mental and spiritual condition my burden almost crushed me. Nor was he benefited by my humor. He is happier to-day than I have seen him since I first knew

him. There is a sweet peace in his heart which gives him courage and contentment. And, as I have said, I am strong. You have seen me weeping, but there is no pain back of my tears."

I melted with emotion as she talked, and when she ceased, prompted by an impulse I could not control, I stepped to her side and said:

"I want to kiss you."

I was afraid to carry out the promptings of my heart, which were to take her in my arms and press her to my bosom, with the hope that I might lift part of the burden from her. She stopped her work and turned her face full upon me. That look has taken up its abode in a chamber of my brain, and there it will remain forever. It was angelic. Love, faith, hope, resignation, and all the spiritual splendors were enthroned in it. I took her in my arms and pressed her lips with passionate earnestness. This for a moment. Our lips parted, and our heads slipped to the side, and rested on each others shoulders. I could feel the beating of her heart, and I feared it would break. Through my tear-blinded eyes I saw Racketts, resting his forehead on the seat of a chair. His sobs fell on my ears. Again fervently and almost reverently kissing her, I said:

"Good bye, dear soul, good bye. I will come again."

I left the room. For a moment I forgot Grace, and turning to reenter the room I met Racketts.

"Wait for Miss Grace," he said.

"Yes, I must wait for Grace. I will go into the hall."

There I stood until I had entirely recovered my composure. Dried my tears away, anxious that Grace

should not see how seriously I had been affected. In a few minutes I was able to go to Grace.

When I opened the door of the dying man's room a scene was presented which took away my strength, and it was with difficulty that I preserved my composure. Grace was sitting close to the bedside. Asleep on her lap was Sunbeam, her fair hair resting against Grace's breast, and one of her little arms twined around her waist. Grace was reading from the Bible. It was the fourteenth chapter of John, that which was uttered by the Master as a final comfort to His disciples. The dying man's large, bright eyes were fixed full on her face, and one of his emaciated hands was resting on her arm which held the book. Frequently her voice trembled as she read the comforting truths, and there were trembled pauses as she proceeded to read. I never heard her voice when it was so full of sympathy and pathetic tenderness. The words sunk into my heart with a force and sweetness I had never felt before. When she finished the chapter she was silent for a moment. Bending down she pressed the forehead of the sleeping child with her lips. The large bright eyes of the dying man grew larger and brighter, the parched lips opened and he said:

"Are you really of earth? Sometimes I think you are not a mortal, but belong to the angelic hosts, and that God in His merciful love has sent you that I might have a foretaste of Heaven. You are mortal, aren't you?"

After a few moments she answered:

"Yes, I am not only mortal, but sinful and unfit to be a teacher. My poor, faltering tongue can only repeat to you the words of sweet comfort which the Savior uttered to console his disciples, and all of us who love and serve Him."

"You have been an angel to me. Your presence is a constant, steady light, illuminating the valley of death, and resigning me to the will of God."

The large eyes closed, and there lay the wasted, bloodless face on which rested a halo not born of earth.

I cleared my throat and said:

"Grace, I am going."

"Yes, dear, go," she replied, without turning her face toward me.

Grace is so thoughtless. She might have known I wanted to stay and help her, if possible, in the painful work in which she was engaged. Yet, what aid could I have given? None. I was helpless in the presence of Mrs. Hastings, and could not comfort her except by embracing and kissing. Grace was right. I would merely have embarrassed the situation, and it was better that I left her as I did.

Just as I reached the front door I met that quaint old man, Uncle Tom McElroy. He opened the door in my face, and was humming the "Home of the Soul." His face seemed to melt into the kindest expression. All the coarse lines were gone, and in their stead a ripeness and sweetness which molded every feature into beauty.

"Glad to see you. Is your sister within?" he asked, holding out his hand, which I clasped with more warmth than propriety.

"You mean my niece, Miss Grace?"

"Oh, yes, yes. Sure enough you are her aunt. I have heard her speak of you."

"Yes, sir, I am. She is within."

"I have not had opportunity to know you well. You must be like her, or perhaps, she like you—in heart, I mean."

"No, we are widely different."

"Well, then I am mistaken. Association should make you alike, in disposition, at least."

"No, sir, I am not. Who is like her?" I asked.

"Very few, very few," he replied. "She only needs wings. I hope not soon. The world needs her. No, we can't spare her," he remarked, as he passed in, humming the "Home of the Soul."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Sympathy is cold to distant misery."

I loitered on, occasionally looking back with the hope that Grace was coming, but she came not. As I reached the hotel I met Dr. Kirkwood and his wife. They bowed to me, he lifting his hat from his head. Her face was even sadder than usual. I wonder whether she suffers from bodily affliction, or from hidden sorrow? As I looked into her face I thought, "some great, leaden grief is oppressing your heart." This is mere conjecture. Well, well. It is better that I should not know aught concerning her. Yet I thought that her heart was in her face. Some wounds can be hidden. Others are so deep that they defy human ingenuity. No stoicism can shelter them. They take their places in the face as though they were too large for the heart to hold. Hers is no doubt of this class, and baffles all effort to keep it in its prison house. It tells its story from every feature and defies the best efforts at dissimulation. Yesterday I saw her, pressing Sunbeam to her breast and passionately kissing her. It is probable that she has lost a child that was woof and web and fiber of her heart. She finds consolation, at least, if not comfort, in Sunbeam, or, perhaps, in any child. It is noticeable that the old doctor humors his wife in this child fancy, recognizing that the presence of Sunbeam is a joy to his wife. When the child approaches them, the doctor goes to meet her,

picks her up tenderly and carries her to his wife, and presents her with affectionate courtesy. There is no doubt of the child's affection for them, and particularly for the wife. She has the sweetest way of clinging to her neck, while Mrs. Kirkwood almost devours her with kisses. Sunbeam acts as if she appreciated their sorrow and feels that she comforts them.

My heart is getting to be very troublesome. I am half inclined to wish I were without one. If it is to continue to make me so unhappy, as I am, it were better it were stone than the poor flesh and blood thing it is. I am getting all mixed up. Why should I be sorrowing? What are these people to me that my sympathy should run out toward them, and disquiet and pain possess me? However, human sympathy is an easily contracted sentiment. When desired, it is an easy matter to make a compromise with conscience, and argue one's self into complete stoicism. The fault lies in the careless guarding of the heart. Impulse is a mean master, and a still worse friend. It leads into all manner of difficulties and disagreeable complications. Life is only valuable and useful when judgment holds the scepter. The exercise of the latter must be subjected to the severest criticism, while the performance of the former must be controlled by the narrowest sense. That is a cold thought and unworthy of me, but we must be cold or sympathy will destroy judgment and make an evil of charity. Our interests are involved to a greater or less degree in every incident of life. As our affections are involved, so is our sympathy measured. A few days ago I read of a tidal wave which swept a point on the South American coast, carrying to death without a moment's warning, thousands of people. I was intensely shocked by the

announcement of such a fearful disaster. In less than a minute I forgot the incident in some gossip, and, a few minutes later, was horrified to read of a runaway in which the life of a lady friend was endangered. She was not severely hurt, but was prostrated with nervousness by the shock.

I forgot all about the death of thousands by the tidal wave. Those people were nothing to me. They belonged to the great human hive, and I had never come in contact with any of them. My affections were not involved, and I could easily forget the incident. The little finger of my friend was of more value to me than ten thousand lives in which I had not a particle of interest. My friend was necessary, to a limited extent, to my happiness. The ten thousand strangers whom I knew not, were not. Our affections must be involved before we can sympathize with human suffering. We must either feel it, see it, or be intimately acquainted in some manner, by blood, interest, or community. When our happiness is threatened, it touches us, and we become a part of it. Am I more selfish than others? Grace is constantly seeking some condition of human existence different from her own, and then grafts her heart to it. She seems most happy when she has abundant material to make her miserable. I am cynical this morning. Am in an abnormal condition, and think my mind is not acting healthfully. I wrong Grace by the assumption in which I have indulged. It is unselfishness and goodness which prompt her charitable deeds and I, well, I am selfish.

CHAPTER XV.

"Love errs in judgment and misguidesthe mind."

I have been sleeping for two hours. Grief always makes me weary. Grace is not yet home.

"I wonder what detains her," I said, speaking to myself.

"Nothing detains her."

This came from the lounge. Grace was lying there with her face buried in a pillow. I stepped to her side and seated myself on an ottoman. She did not speak, and I stooped and kissed her. She threw her head in my lap and sobbed.

"Don't," I said, "It pains me to see you weep."

"It relieves me," she answered.

"Then weep on. I know you need relief. Your sympathy has loaded your heart with sorrow," I said, pressing her brow with my hand.

"It is a precious burden, and I delight in carrying it. All the sorrow in my heart is just that much less for them to carry."

"Oh Grace, I had not thought of that. My heart has been aching, and I have been grumbling with myself, that I permitted my sympathies to run out toward those people. While with them, I felt that it was entirely proper for me to exhibit emotion. It was a duty, I thought, but when I got home, I felt that I had better remained away, and thus not familiarized myself

with their suffering. There is so much of it in the world that, if we seek for it, we shall constantly be unhappy. If by suffering I can lessen their load, perhaps it is my duty to bear it. Do you feel that our sympathy has lessened their grief?"

"They are much happier than before they knew us," she replied.

"What makes you think so?"

"I know they are. It is not necessary for them to tell me so," she continued. "I can read it in their faces. The poor wife, after you had gone, told me that you had shared her burden. Your interview greatly strengthened her. She said that she was more resigned, and better prepared for her duty."

"Grace, dear, I am a wicked woman. I was wishing that I did not have a heart, or, if I must have one, that it were incapable of sympathy—one of stone."

"Well, my dear aunt, if such were your thoughts you were wicked. There is nothing of us worth anything but our hearts. Brains, give them their way, make unfeeling monsters of us. They turn the heart to winter, cold, cold winter. We are dead, living dead."

"Oh Grace, how wretchedly selfish I am. I had not thought of my duty, in the broad sense in which you put it. I was full of pity for these people, but I never thought of sharing their sorrows, and thus aiding them to bear them. Pity is only akin to sympathy. The latter is the active element, and its expression is to relieve by sharing the burden."

"Pity carries with it the selfish congratulation that we are not suffering," replied Grace, and then continuing:

"Sympathy is the helping hand, when it is possible to help. It is indeed the active principle in all chari-

table work. To give from pity is a perfunctory act. We dismiss the incident which arouses it; but sympathy goes into the heart of the incident which awakens it, and abides with it, sharing its burden, weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing with those who rejoice. Not possessed of it, we are of the living dead."

She repeated the last sentence and then walked to the door. I had not heard the rap. When she opened it, there stood Racketts, and the Major, with a small basket of washed laces.

"Where is Sunbeam?" she asked.

"She is with Dr. and Mrs. Kirkwood."

"I told you to bring her with you."

"Yes, Miss Grace, and I was doin' it, until we got to the veranda. There the old doctor jist picked her up without saying a word, and carried her to his wife. They's so kind to her that I couldn't say anything. Why, even the Major seemed pleased and run after her, which is his duty, until I called him back. They jist dotes on her."

"Here, Grace, you can see her from this window," I said.

She came to where I was standing. On the beach was the old Doctor, with Sunbeam in his arms, while his invalid wife was close to his side, one hand hidden in the golden curls of Sunbeam. Grace took in the scene for a few moments, and then said:

"That child is a perfect worriment. I told her when she was last with me, that she must not permit that old Doctor to fondle her. Now look! She is in his arms, and has one of her arms around his neck, while Mrs. Kirkwood is toying with the child's hair. I will have to ask her mother to forbid the constant intimacy.

I wish those two people would leave here before he dies."

"Why, Grace," I said, in surprise, "a moment ago you were the pink of sweetness, and all heart. Now you are the essence of gall. Why do you exhibit such seeming malignant hate toward the Doctor and his wife? Are you so selfish as to desire to monopolize the child's love? May she not give a little to those two people whose whole demeanor indicates that they too have sorrow? They love the child. She gives them comfort, and it is evident that Sunbeam dearly loves them. Is it not possible, nay, probable, that the child reminds them of a little one they have lost, and whose presence has been in their hearts for years? The child no doubt reminds them of a lost darling. Only yesterday I saw the old lady pressing the child to her heart, and holding her there as if she would like to do so forever."

"That is just it. I, too, believe that they have a sorrow such as you suggest. What I fear is, that in the event of the death of the father, those people will endeavor to heal their own wounds by opening wider those of the poor widowed mother. It is most probable that they will offer to relieve her of part of her heavy burden by adopting Sunbeam, and at the moment when she is overloaded with grief, they will have the cruelty to ask her to give up another idol. They will then find me in the breach. What do the worldly rich know of the poor, and the wretched and the grief-stricken, or what consideration do they give to the suffering humble? To them the poor are mere beasts of burden, existing only to administer to the wants or pleasures of their more fortunate (in a worldly sense) fellow beings. The haughty reserve

and studied isolation of the Kirkwoods, show that they are cold, heartless, vulgar people, and who will see no impropriety in taking the step I suggest. What would they care for snapping heart cords, if their sorrows were eased? Such people never hear the throbbing of the poor. But they shall not have her, even though she were to become motherless when she becomes fatherless. Were the mother to sink into the grave under the cumulative weight of her sorrow, Sunbeam shall not be theirs,'' Grace said, with most emphatic tone and gesture.

''Grace,'' I replied, ''your indignation has gotten the better of your judgment. A fiction is possessing you. They are not vulgar people, and you know it. I make no claim to being unerring in reading hearts by looking into faces and eyes, and yet I am confident that those two people need your sympathy to the very largest degree. They are sufferers who sip from sorrow's cup every hour of the day. Physically they seem in health, though it is most apparent that mental and heart agony are wearing the life out of Mrs. Kirkwood. I do not think them haughty, nor cold, nor heartless. They are dignified and reserved, but in my opinion, their grief is so great that they have no moments to give to society. Were they to mingle with the crowd, their unhappiness would be increased. Is the affection they show for the child evidence of cold heartedness? Oh, no. She relieves their grief, and every time Mrs. Kirkwood presses Sunbeam to her breast, her heart pain is softened. You misjudge them. They are refined, cultivated people, husbanding a sorrow. The poor to them are as the rich. True, they are reserved, and seclusive, courting the wealthy no more than the poor, and asking no sympathy, but are content in bearing their own burdens

without the help of others. Were they aware of the sorrow in the cottage, their hearts would ache more keenly than they do.''

''Why have they not discovered that there is suffering in the cottage?'' she asked, following the three with her eyes as they walked along the beach.

''They, like I, would not have discovered it, until it was too late to serve. You have fortunate incidents and accidents almost every instant of your life, which give cast to your desire.''

''Well, let us dismiss the subject. As usual you will have your own way about the matter. I hope I am mistaken in my estimate of them, yet I fear I am not.'' Calling Racketts, she asked, ''Where does Mrs. Kirkwood get her laces washed?''

''Her does it. He's very kind and always sends a bill to Mrs. Hastings. When I took the first change back to him, he told me to take it back to Mrs. Hastings, and say that he always fixed the price on work done for him. Sometimes the bill is big, and then Mrs. Hastings she cries. A few days ago he gave me a bill and told me to send it to my mother.''

''What does he know about your mother?'' asked Grace, petulantly.

''All,'' replied Racketts.

''All? What do you mean?''

''I mean, Miss Grace, that he and his wife got me to tell them all about the dear old soul, and she cried and kissed me, and the Doctor, he asked where my mother lived in the city, and said he would write a letter to her about me, and he did, and he read it to me, and he told her I was good, and that for my sake he was sending her a present, and it was a bank bill, for I saw

him put it in, and I took it to the mail, and mother got it, for she wrote back and thanked him, and he likes the Major, and he says that Major and I shall work for him when we all go back to the city, and that he'll buy a muzzle for him, and I hope you aint mad with me."

When the boy ceased, Grace was resting her head in her hands, and so remained for some moments. When she spoke, it was to say :

"Go and bring Sunbeam to me. Tell Dr. Kirkwood that Miss Grace Preston wants her for a few minutes, and that she will send her back to them. Now hurry." Then turning to me, she said :

"Aunt Rebecca, will you put the things away? I am so tired. I feel like lying down."

As she passed me I saw that her eyes were moist, and her cheeks were flushed.

"Yes, dear, lie down. You need rest. Shall I call you when Sunbeam comes?"

"No, send her in to me."

In a few minutes Racketts returned with the child.

"What did Dr. Kirkwood say when you told him who wanted Sunbeam?" I asked.

"They both kissed her, and he said: "Racketts, you will give Miss Preston our respects, and say we take pleasure in sending her Sunbeam." He thinks you are both hunkie, because Sunbeam and me is always tellin' them about you, and how good you are."

I sent the child in to Grace, and all I heard her say was, "Come here, dear. Now go to sleep."

Racketts interested me by telling me who was at the hotel, and dwelling on the extraordinary qualities of the Major and Joe.

"Who is Joe?" I inquired.

"He's a nigger boy who plays with me."

"Do you like to play with negro boys?"

"Yes, with Joe, 'cause he's kind. He comes down here from the city with me, and works around almost everywhere. He helps me all he can, and I helps him all I can."

"Then you are old friends," I remarked.

"I fust knowed Joe when little sister died. We was livin' on the wharf then, and little sister took sick, and there was a long time she lived in bed or in mother's arms, and I was sick too, not much though, but I couldn't go for the doctor, and so Joe would go for the doctor, and when sister got worse, Joe's mother she came and stayed in our house, all the time nearly, helpin' mother and takin' care of me, 'cause mother couldn't take care of little sister an' me too, and at last little sister died, an' then mother wasn't able to sit up any more, and Joe's mother put her to bed and stayed with her, and I was so excited I got well, and a man came an' put little sister in the coffin, and Joe he had got a furniture wagon, and said to me, 'Racketts, we is the funeral,' and he and me got into the wagon, side of the coffin, and the funeral started, and we saw her buried, and we both cried, and ever since then I play with Joe."

I had to go out into the hall for something, but when I got there I could not think what it was. When I returned, Grace and Sunbeam were there. Taking Sunbeam by the hand she left, remarking:

"We are going to Miss McMillan's room to see about Miss Dolly, who has been spending the day there. Sunbeam says that she fears her ladyship is sick, and is confident Miss Flora has neglected her. Has Racketts gone?"

'Just this moment he passed me in the hall. He told me he would be back soon.''

''Tell him he need not wait for Sunbeam, I will take her home.''

CHAPTER XVI.

" Thou'rt such a touchy, testy fellow."

Last evening I was sitting on the veranda, when Mr. Cowls came hobbling along. In response to a smile and recognition, he was kind enough to stop and entertain me. He has a penchant for criticising everybody at the hotel. He detests ultra fashionable people, and is rather pitiless, and perhaps unjust, in his denunciation of the follies and pretensions which our weakness or vanity force us to exhibit. He was in hot pursuit of Mr. Primrose, when the proprietor, Mr. Potts, hove in sight. Mr. Cowls gathered his crutches closely under himself, and turned his back to the advancing Potts. The latter stopped, bowed to me very respectfully, and stood silently listening to Mr. Cowls. Only a moment or two was allowed to pass, when Mr. Potts interjected the remark :

"Too severe, my dear Mr. Cowls. Yes. Too severe. Yes. Mr. Primrose is a very proper person. Yes. And one of my guests. Yes."

"He is, is he? Don't 'dear' me, Potts. How dare you do so? You're a skin deep man. You talk from your teeth or your pocket," replied Mr. Cowls, evidently excited.

"It is my duty to protect my guests. Yes. Mr. Primrose is a very proper person. Yes. He is a sensible young man."

"So he is. Ought to be keeping a hotel on the

beach. Has about sense enough for it, for it requires but little," said Mr. Cowls, as he hobbled away.

"Touched one of his sores," said Potts. "Yes. One of his sores. There is a good deal of tartar in that bundle of rheumatism. Yes. Feels hot the moment he sees me. My presence is his occasion. Yes. I came intentionally. Yes. He needed his block. Yes. I was away all the afternoon, and he has been on the lookout for me for hours. Yes. Yes. He is anathemizing me this minute, but he will sleep better tonight. Yes."-

Just at this moment Mr. Potts, to my regret, was called away. He is a character, and can only be sketched by regular sittings.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Stupidity and pretension."

This morning Grace was up with the sun, and away along the beach before the servants were stirring. She was at the cottage, and was met by Mr. McMillan on her way back. She has been oyster dumb about her love since she received her father's letter, until after breakfast this morning, when she said:

"You had better write to father."

"Have you written?"

"No, and will not."

"The condition has not arisen on which you rested your correspondence. I am not drowned. What shall I say to him?"

"Nothing."

"That will be a short letter."

"Yes, father likes brevity."

"Then you had better write, if there is nothing to say."

"No, you are the scribe. Besides I will need all my powers when he arrives. Much talk will be necessary, and I shall have to do it. That will be a great relief to you," she replied with a quizzical smile.

"Yes, I know how much you will relieve me. I expect to bear the brunt of this adventure, if brunt there is."

"Indeed you will. Your carelessness has lost Pa

his daughter. Nor will it in the least soften his anger that you have found him a son ;'' saying which, she, laughing, and swinging her hat by the strings, left the room. Those two people cannot be out of each others presence an hour during the day and earlier part of the night. Without prearrangement, they will know where to find each other any moment of the day. George McMillan is leisurely walking toward the hotel.

I sought the seat I had occupied on the veranda, where Mr. Cowls and Potts had their spat. I was in hopes that one or both of them would pass my way. Scarcely was I seated when Flora McMillan and Mr. Primrose put in an appearance. I rose with intent of going to my room, when Flora's voice fairly split the air with:

"Don't you go. I want you."

I was compelled to remain.

"Of course you are acquainted with Mr. Primrose?" she said.

"Yes, I replied, I had the honor of meeting Mr. Primrose the night of the storm."

"Yes, indeed, you did," he said languidly and without salutation. "You comforted mother very much. You told us that the beastly water was going back."

While he talked, I photographed him. He reminds me of pictures I have seen of an Austrian infantry soldier. His clothes fit his person as a kid glove should a lady's hand. It must be difficult for him to move about. The material must be excellently and stoutly put together. The probability is, that a quick movement to a stooping posture, would result in a mortifying accident. As if to test the probability, Miss Flora dropped her fan. He exhibited much adroitness in picking it up. As he

stooped, his left leg was thrown to the rear, until it rested on the tip of the toe. His right bowed instead of bending. His left hand was thrown across the small of his back, apparently necessary to keep his equilibrium. He stepped close to where it was lying, and cautiously went through the movement I have described, in picking it up. As he straightened he took a step backward, and, unfortunately, trod on the tail of a small dog that was dozing on the floor. The little animal yelped from pain, while Mr. Primrose dropped the fan, turned pale, and fell into a chair with the exclamation:

"I'm bit."

"No, you are not," said Flora.

"Yes I am. I feel the blood running down my leg. Where's mother? What's she always away for?"

As though in response to his inquiry, his mother turned the corner of the veranda. The moment she saw his starchy colored face, she sprang to his side with:

"Oh! What is it?"

"I'm bit by the dog," he gasped.

"You are not," said Flora in a vexed tone.

"Oh, my poor son!" Then turning to Flora, "He knows."

"Why didn't you have him driven away, mother?"

"Mr. Primrose," I said, "you are not bitten. The little dog is the only one hurt."

This was partly reassuring. He examined the calf of his leg, rubbing his hand up and down it.

"I know that one of these days I'll die of hydrophobia. Dogs have a spite at me, and are constantly trying to bite me. Only a year ago one tore a piece out of my trousers. Didn't he, mother?"

"Yes, my son, but don't talk about it," she replied, patting his cheeks.

"I wish there were no dogs. They are of no use and ought to be killed. I hate dogs, and want them all poisoned, as they do in the large cities," he drawled.

"Come to your room, my son, and get composed," said his mother, taking him by the arm and half lifting him out of the chair. As he stepped forward, Flora dropped her glove. He looked at it for a moment, and then said:

"I'm too weak."

Leaning on his mother he went to his room. A few minutes after the hotel doctor was seen entering it.

"The poor ninny. I will send for a supply of dogs, and quarter them near his room. They will be 'biters' too. Don't you think they will add to his comfort?" said Flora.

Before I could make any reply, she asked, "Where is Grace?"

"I don't know. She left me an hour ago, without saying where she was going. Did you meet her this morning?"

"Yes, met her at the door of the breakfast hall. Brother stopped with her for a few moments. After breakfast, when he had located me with Mr. Primrose, he left. I had been with Mr. Primrose an hour before we met you."

"Flora, how is it possible for you to spend an hour with that man?" I asked.

"Easily, very easily. First, he feeds my vanity. Second, I feed his vanity. Third, I find pleasure in the ridiculous. Fourth, I am anxious to enlarge my infortion of man—want to see every variety of the *genus homo*. This one is a rare specimen."

"No doubt he is, but a disgusting one," I interjected.

"Oh, Miss Rebecca, you must relieve yourself of prejudice. I am sorry I interfered to save you."

"Interfered to save me!" I exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes, indeed, I did. Grace told me of the annoyance he was giving you, and I determined to step between. He would be going through these graceful movements for your fan or glove, instead of mine, had I not deliberately set to work to divert his thoughts from an object he was determined to worship. He had been adoring you in secret for weeks, and was just on the point of showing his devotion in words and deeds, when my angelic presence dispelled the illusion."

"All I can say in return is, 'thanks.' I cannot imagine a more insufferable annoyance, than to be the object of admiration in the brain of such a nonenity. He is the most utterly unattractive man I ever met."

"You wrong him, my dear Miss Rebecca. He is not entirely destitute of value. Do you not observe that I make him useful? I have weighed his capabilities, intellectual, emotional, moral and physical. He has sufficient of the first to make him a responsible being—no more. Is flooded with the second, and when not expressing itself at the bidding of his nerves or his mother, or some being he thinks he loves, he is simply stupid and very uninteresting. The third is so dwarfed that it is impossible for him to distinguish any difference between himself and the Supreme Being. The fourth has been so confined in tight clothes, that its development has been seriously retarded. Were it possible to get him out of them, he would burst into an Appollo Belvidere. I

am determined to relieve him, if it can be done by his stooping."

She was interrupted by Grace who came upon us unobserved.

"Your brother is making inquiry for you," she said as she entered.

"When did he ask for me? At the door of the breakfast room, where we met you hours ago?" she asked with a laugh.

"No. Did I say he inquired of me?"

"No, sweet, you did not. What has he been saying to you to make you so serious?"

"Describing the moon to me—picturing its barrenness and desolation, and informing me that the earth, some of these beautiful days a million or so years hence, will be like unto the present condition of the moon. I was sad from thinking of the unpleasant situation of the people living at that time. Sad thought, was it not?"

"Very. Poor moon."

"Yes, and poor earth that is to be."

They both laughed. Flora went in search of her brother, and Grace and I to our rooms.

"When do you expect your father," I asked.

"Don't expect him at all."

"Why, Grace, you surprise me. Have you received another letter? He said in your letter, and also in mine, that he would be down soon. Now, you say that you do not expect him."

"Why should I? He will come just as soon as his business will permit. Why should I worry myself indulging in expectations?"

"Well, I am impatient to learn his conclusions as to Mr. McMillan, and I think it strange that such an im-

portant matter does not command more immediate attention. Now, while I have not spoken to you on the subject, it absorbs most of my thought."

"Why, auntie, you dear old soul, why should you fret? I am unconcerned. Know as well what he will say as if he had said it."

"What will he say," I asked.

"He will bid me love Mr. McMillan with all my mind, and with all my heart, and with all my soul. You know what a difficult task that will be," she said in a distressed tone of voice.

"Yes, to love him more than you do. Your heart and soul and senses are involved to their utmost capacity. If he require more, he will impose an impossibility," I replied.

"Aunt Rebecca, you are right. My life is a flood of joy. I have a well in my heart, which is continually overflowing with a wealth of love, compared with which, all other things are valueless. All the morning I have been walking with him. He spoke no word of love, yet every word he uttered was weighted with it. He is not effusive, and so I wish him to remain. I desire no declaration. Protestations would grow tame, and affirmations commonplace and stupid. The sweetest pain in the world is born of a doubt. What will I say to father when he asks me for my sentiments?"

"Frankly say you love George McMillan."

"Yes, I love him. That is what I will say."

"That will end it," I replied.

"No, that will begin it. Eternity will not end it," she replied as she left me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Evening, night, morning."

This was the most beautiful evening I ever saw. The sun went down bathed in exquisite glory—such as will surround him when he sinks to rest under the edict of eternity, when time shall be no more. It seemed a regal death, and all the elements and forces which are the offspring of his mighty heart, were present. Just an hour before he set, the atmosphere assumed a deeper blue than I have ever before seen. To the east, the ocean and the sky were of the same color, and it was impossible to mark where they blended. The sea seemed to reach far into the heavens, and mighty ships appeared to be sailing on the sky. In the west, from the horizon to the meridian, flocks of white wind-ladened clouds were in rapid motion. Above these were long strips of mist, looking tangled and lost. Above these were sheet clouds, thin, but compact, without any visible motion. Above all was the deep blue ether, in the illimitable space of which, the universe is housed. As the sun sunk lower, the heavier clouds colored to maroon, and then to purple. The misty strips became scarlet streams, while the upper strata assumed the rarest of pink. Away to the south, lay a great bank, apparently the remnant of a storm, the center of which was raven black. Scarcely had his majesty disappeared, when the blue in the east turned to blackness, and distance was

lost to vision. Night came as if whipped from its hiding place. It struggled up the zenith until it met the clouds, still radiant with the fire which the life-breathing god of day's expiring power infused into them. There was an apparent struggle for supremacy, a going out and returning of the rich colors. Suddenly night conquered, the colors vanished, and darkness embraced every fleecy speck. The great monster lying to the south, whose heart refused to be penetrated by the golden sunshine of expiring day, kept up vivid flashes, protesting its supremacy over darkness. It seemed a human thing filled with electric power. In a few minutes the stars came, not one by one, but all at once, filling illimitable space with their dazzling beauty, and jeweling the night as though begging comparison with the day. Quietly and slowly the east grew light, proclaiming the advent of the great pensioner. In a few moments the full round moon, silver-faced, leaped upon the waters, dispelling the darkness and putting to sleep myriads of night's jewels. Only a few remained to dispute with the stately queen for the homage of mortals. While I sat absorbed with the scene, Grace entered with:

"We are all going to the village to-night. So get ready."

"What has suggested this visit," I inquired.

"A confidential communication from Racketts. There is to be a concert there to-night, and we are going to attend."

"Who gives it?"

"One of the village maids. Racketts was not very communicative. Said he dared not say much, but hinted that Mr. Cowls would be pleased to see us there.

So I promised him we would all attend, meaning Flora, Mr. McMillan, you and I."

"All have promised to attend?" I inquired.

"Yes, and they will be ready before us. So bustle, my dear. There is no use of primping."

"I suppose you think you have landed your fish?"

"Aunt Rebecca, you have forgotten the covenant. Think of that crippled—"

"Grace, don't say it."

"Well, then, be good and sweet, and obedient."

In a few minutes we were ready, and, seated in an open carriage, we started for the village, Mr. McMillan driving.

"Is there any danger?" I asked. "Can Mr. McMillan drive?"

"Better than Apollo," she answered in a whisper.

It is a quaint old town, fearfully scattered, and destitute of paved sidewalks. Sand abounded. We stopped at the village hotel, a rickety weather-boarded building, all dried up and cracked, with one of its ends several inches lower than the other. The landlord, as they called him, said we were late, as the concert was to commence at early candle lighting, and that hour had passed some time ago. However, he had not heard the music yet, and supposed the concert hadn't commenced. We were soon at the church door. The room was crowded, but on purchasing our tickets and presenting ourselves at the door, the good people made way for us and we passed in. A rough, weather-beaten old fisherman, whom Grace had met on the beach, recognized her, and he rose from his seat, and, proceeding up the aisle, requested us to follow. On reaching the front pews we

observed that there was a vacant one. Turning to Grace, he said:

"Go in. It'll be all right. He directed it to be saved. They hold six, and he and the other cripple can get in too."

We took seats. In a few minutes there was a commotion at the door, and "There they come" could be heard over all parts of the audience. My surprise was great when I turned my head. Mr. Cowls, on his crutches, came first, hobbling along, followed by Racketts, holding the hand of a young girl. Mr. Cowls paused at the entrance of our pew, bowed and smiled, and took a seat in it. Racketts led the young girl to the altar, and seated her at the organ. He removed her hat and brought it with him to our pew, Mr. Cowles moving up close to Mr. McMillan, to give the boy a seat. I was attracted more by Racketts than by the girl. When I looked toward her, I saw that she was blind. Her large dumb eyes stared into vacancy. Her face was marvelously beautiful, of Grecian type. The contour was perfect; the complexion rivaled the tints of the sea shell, and the expression was heavenly. She touched the keys and commenced "There Is a Land of Pure Delight." Her voice was sweet beyond my power to describe, with excellent range and texture, not exhibiting much cultivation, but telling of almost limitless possibilities. Then followed, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul;" "Rock of Ages;" "Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," and several other selections from the Methodist Hymnal. She closed with the "Fisherman's Daughter." The evening was most delightfully spent. Mr. Cowls gathered himself on his crutches and stepped toward the altar, giving us easy egress from the pew.

It was evident that Grace was not going to leave until she had made the acquaintance of the singer. She pressed up to Mr. Cowls, and spoke to him in a low tone.

"Certainly, certainly, yes, she will be pleased," said Mr. Cowls.

Grace went to the side of the girl and bending down kissed her.

"Who is it?" asked the blind girl.

"Why, it's Miss Grace I've been tellin' you of," replied Racketts.

"Oh, yes, I know you, Miss. Racketts has told me about you. Where is the other lady?" she asked.

"She wants to see you, Miss Rebecca," said Racketts. "She's askin' for you."

I stepped forward, took her hand and thanked her for the pleasure she had given me. Flora came too, and in her rollicking spirit, complimented the singer. Grace was talking to Mr. Cowls.

"I should have sent you tickets had I thought you would have found pleasure in attending. Would have been honored in serving you," said Mr. Cowls.

"Thanks. We were fortunate in learning that the concert was to be given. It has been a delightful evening to me. I was surprised to see such a large audience. Why, the whole village must have been here."

"Yes, they are all here. They all turn out to hear her."

"Then she gives them frequently?"

"Only one each season," replied Mr. Cowls.

"She should give another. Were it known at the beach how sweetly she sings, all the visitors would patronize her. We can advertise her," replied Grace.

"Not for the world. Not for the world. It would subject her to the criticism of the ignorant and the fools. I will talk to you further about it, but not here. She might hear us. Not here," said Mr. Cowls, as he started to the door.

"He won't have but one," said Racketts. "They are his. He buys all the tickets himself, and sends them to the people, so they all come. Then he gives her all the money. She don't know how he works it. She can't see. She's blind. Tomorrow he'll drive over here and tell her all about it—how the church was so full, and that you were here, and how pleased everybody was. That's the way he did last year, and all the money she got isn't gone yet, for she told me."

"Stop talking," said Grace. "Come to see me tomorrow morning."

"Where is Racketts," inquired the blind girl.

He was at her side in a moment.

"Here I is. Come on. He's waiting at the door." Saying which he aided her to adjust her hat, then taking her hand he led her from the church. At the door stood Mr. Cowls, surrounded by the villagers, who were paying him the utmost deference and respect. We waited until Mr. Cowls and his protege had gotten into a carriage. As we passed from the door, we noticed that nearly the entire audience was waiting. We had been the object of curiosity from the moment we entered the church. Our ride back was delicious. There was what is called a "spanking breeze" sweeping in from the ocean, and when we reached the beach, each felt as though he had been drinking wine, so exhilarating had been our ride.

In a few minutes Mr. Cowls, and his driver, Racketts, arrived. Scarcely was the former helped from the buggy when he inquired for Grace.

She was strolling the veranda with Mr. McMillan, but we sent for her. Mr. Cowls requested a private talk, and the two went apart from us, where they remained for a few minutes. Just as Mr. Cowls was in the act of bidding us good night, Mr. Potts, in slippers, stepped up.

"Very pleasant evening, ladies and gentlemen, yes, very pleasant. Been out driving? Yes. Beautiful night to drive. Yes."

Mr. Cowls' manner changed instantly. He scarcely finished his good night, but hurriedly hobbled away, looking back over his left shoulder and scowling at Potts. I could see that his lips were moving rapidly, but no sound, that I could hear, came from them. I concluded that he was enjoying what Potts calls one of his luxuries. Potts glanced after Mr. Cowls, and then said :

"Has his moods. Yes. Is in one of them now. Yes. It's late for him to indulge in one. Yes. Usually at this hour calls me Mr. Potts and speaks kindly. Yes. Has reviewed the day, and his heart has mellowed. Yes. Was too busy to use his block in the early part of the evening. Yes. Will not go to bed till he corners me. Yes. I'll intentionally run against him, so that he will not fret waiting for me."

"Mr. Potts," said Grace, "you appear to know Mr. Cowls."

"Know him, yes, better than if I had laid his keel. Yes. Know him all over, inside and out. Yes. See what a big head he has. Yes. Big as it is, it is smaller than his heart. Yes. Much smaller. Yes. I'm nec-

essary to his happiness. Yes. Would be miserable without me. Yes. Miserable. I have to humor him to make him happy. Yes. Have to be disagreeable, and I am. Yes, disagreeable—the last thing I want to be, only I am so that he may sleep well. Yes. Just now I interrupted him. Yes. Past his bed-time. Yes. Ought to have been asleep two hours ago. Yes. Thinks I don't know him. Yes. He's doing a little cussing now. Yes. Strange, very strange, but it does him good. Yes. Wants me to believe that he is savage, cruel and malignant. Yes. Deceives himself. Yes. I'm up to all his conceits, but I'm always blind and dumb. Yes. I was out there tonight. Yes. I attend all of them. Yes. This is the third. Yes. Didn't show myself. Yes. Looked in the window. Saw you all. Yes. Saw him. Yes. Saw him, saw what none of you did. Yes. Saw the big tears in his eyes. Yes. Big tears. Yes. He turned his head away from you all when the water came. Turned toward me at the window. Yes. Looked right at me, but the tears blinded him. Yes. It is well they did, or he would have seen me. Yes. If he had, he would have gone into snipgins and discommoded the concert. Yes. Would have torn the church down getting out, if he had seen me through his tears. Yes."

"And were you there?" asked Grace.

"Of course I was. Yes. I have been to them all. Yes. But he has never seen me there. Yes. He thinks he is playing his cards close to his breast, but I see them all. Yes. He deceives the blind girl. Yes. Deceives her. Makes her believe that the concert nets over three hundred dollars in that rickety old town. Yes. He gets them up. Nobody buys a ticket. Yes. He takes them all. Yes. Sends them to everybody with the compli-

ments of 'William Cowls.' Yes. Were you ever at the blind girl's home? Yes. Her grandmother is very old but very interesting. Yes. Antedates everybody in this section. Yes. Jessie has been blind since she was seven years old. Yes. Just went blind. Yes. Her big, black eyes grew blacker, and the little spots in the center went out. Yes. Then she was blind. Yes. Blind. The birds taught her to sing, and now she beats them. Yes. They brought her over here one day and Mr. Cowls heard her. Yes. Somebody, maybe it was I, told him her story. Yes. One day he obtruded himself on them. Yes. Now he's there every sunshiny day. Yes. He gets up the concerts so that he may, without asking, make a contribution. Yes. That's what he calls it. Yes. A contribution. Yes. Last winter he sent for me, and when I went to him he called me 'my dear Potts.' Yes. Said that he was thinking as the winter was so intense that the blind girl and her grandmother might be suffering. Yes. It was near the holidays. Yes, and he said that if he could find some discreet person, yes, discreet person, he would send them a little present. Yes, a little present. Yes, some discreet person. Yes. That was I. Yes. So he bolted me down here in the bitter winter weather with hampers and baskets and bundles, because I was a discreet person. Yes. I was just to deliver them without saying whom they were from. Yes. I was to be dumb. Yes. When I got back he asked me 'What did Jessie say when she saw them?' Yes. When she saw them. I told him when she saw them she clapped her little hands and said, 'Oh! They are from him. If he was only here that I could thank him and give him a Christmas kiss, I would be so happy.' Yes. Well, he just rattled those

crutches as he exclaimed, 'Potts, now go. Leave me instantly, Potts. Don't provoke me any more. I am tired of you and never want to see you again.' Yes. He turned his back to me while he abused me, and his speech was slow and thick. Yes. As I was leaving, he said, 'Potts, can't you open on the first of May? June is too late. Now, my dear Potts, do open early.' Yes, he said, 'Now, my dear Potts, do open early.' But I'm keeping him up. Yes. I'll go to him and let him chop a little. Yes.''

At this point the hotel clerk called to Mr. Potts and we went to our rooms.

CHAPTER XIX.

" The pains of love are sweeter than pleasures."

I had not risen when Grace returned from her morning walk. She witnesses the sunrise every day which is not cloudy. Uncle Tom McElroy is the only other person who rises so early. Usually he and Grace meet and walk together to the cottage, where they spend half an hour or more. Then Grace loiters along the beach until the breakfast hour. What she muses on I do not know, but she seems to have plenty of things to employ her thoughts. As she entered my room she addressed me:

" Oh, you laziness. You have missed the sweetest morning of the season. The beautiful night was a prelude to a more beautiful morning. The air is a cordial. It is better than a bath in the surf, to be fanned by the winds which have been kissing the crested waves all the night. The great rolling mother of health was never more generous than this morning. Get up quickly. I am as hungry as a bear."

While I dressed she told me of her visit to the cottage, saying that Mr. Hastings was sinking very rapidly. One hour might terminate all, and yet he might linger for days. His heart and brain and eyes were all that possessed life. He had such peace, too. While he talked but little, a constant smile rested on his face. Uncle Tom McElroy said that the invalid's feet were on the portals, and the infinite light was shining on his face.

As for herself, for some reason, her happiness had increased, and she felt light of heart as the air she breathed. Just as I finished my toilet there was a rap at the door, and to Grace's response "Come," in stepped her father. In an instant she was in his arms, and clung to him so long I was compelled to pull her away that I might have a kiss and an embrace. She seated him and then sat on his knee as she was wont in girlhood. She chattered away like a bird in a song, telling him everything. As he pressed her to his bosom, he said:

"I thought I could part with you, but I cannot."

"Oh, yes, you can. We will both sit on your knee. I do not intend to leave you. I am going to quarter him on you."

"On my knee?"

"Oh, no. In our home. I told him that one of these days he must give up his Michigan home and come to New York, and he answered, 'Anywhere, so that I am at your side.'"

"Then he is to be at your side all the time?"

"Yes, as you were by the side of my sainted mother."

"And he shall be," was the reply.

Things were getting very demonstrative and I concluded I would go to Flora's room and tell her of the arrival.

"I am dying to see him," said Flora, "and will make an accidental call on Grace immediately after breakfast."

"Breakfast with us."

"No, you, I mean Grace, needs him all to herself for an hour. After breakfast I will call."

When I returned to our rooms I found Grace still

on her father's knee, her head resting on his shoulder, with his lips to her cheek.

"We have had a sweet talk," said Mr. Preston as I entered.

"My dear, dear father," said Grace as she looked into his face.

Mr. Preston spoke of Mr. McMillan's visit to New York, and the surprise and alarm he felt on learning the object of the visit. He was relieved when Mr. McMillan informed him that he had not spoken of his love to Grace, and came to ask his permission to win her love. That he had entered into an understanding with him that the relations between him and Grace should remain undeveloped until he could satisfy himself as to Mr. McMillan's character and worth. The latter had given him references, west and east, and he had carefully attested them, and was satisfied that he was worthy of his daughter."

"Did he tell you that his eyes had tongues?" asked Grace, laughing.

"No, he did not; but I guessed as much, otherwise you would not have given him that letter of introduction. I think that was a piece of finesse to get your lover into my presence."

"You guess well. That was just what I did. He had to have some aid, or voucher, and who so fitted as myself to give one?"

"I told Mr. McMillan," continued Mr. Preston, "that I was favorably impressed with his appearance and manners, and still more so with the consideration he paid me by consulting me before he made any positive advance to Grace. He had supplied himself with commendatory letters, of general character, but none bearing on the matter which he presented to me. Some of

these letters were from tested business friends of mine. In any ordinary matter I would have given him the largest credit, but when my daughter's happiness was involved, I required time for a thorough investigation. To this he assented, and assured me that until my approval, he would continue a respectful attention to Grace, but added, 'This I cannot do without exhibiting a tenderness which mere friendship does not warrant.' I begged him to the utmost care, and not to increased devotion."

"And father, he has religiously observed it. Never a word of love has he spoken to me. He has observed a dignified deference, and I surmised the disagreeable but necessary conditions you imposed. There were times when his eyes ceased to talk; but, do what he might, the orbs would grow eloquent, and then I was happy."

"Then he has kept his faith. I know it is impossible to control eyes. They will talk, do what you may to keep them dumb," replied her father.

"Do you speak from experience, father?"

"Well, no. That is, if I ever thought that eyes spoke to me, it was long ago—long ago, and they are not here to speak now. Yes, long ago, long ago."

"My mother's?"

"Yes, dear, your mother's," he replied.

He drew her closer to his breast. They were both silent for a time. When he again spoke it was to say:

"From this hence the restriction is removed. His tongue may say what it will."

"It cannot be more eloquent than his eyes. Indeed I prefer them, and when he commences to tell his love in words, it is possible I may forbid him."

"Wait until you hear him say 'I love you'—until he

tells you how dear you are to him. It is my opinion that eyes' talk will be dull and stupid."

"You will see him soon, father?"

"Yes, if he calls upon me soon."

Our breakfast was the most enjoyable meal I ever ate. True, it was plain, all luxuries absent, but every mouthful was as taken from a comb of honey. We lingered there for an hour. He detailed all the New York, our circle, news, and we listened as though we had been absent for years.

We were scarcely back in our rooms when Flora McMillan came in. When Grace presented her to Mr. Preston, she blundered fearfully.

"Father, Miss Flora McMillan, daughter of George McMillan."

Mr. Preston put on a surprised look, when Flora spoke up with—

"I'm his sister, not his daughter."

Grace threw up both arms and exclaimed:

"Why of course you are. Do you think I would fall in love with a widower, with a daughter old enough to be my mother?"

"Then you are in love? How you have protested to the contrary. 'Old enough to be my mother,' she repeated. "Miss Preston has heretofore treated me as if I were an infant. Meeting me as an invalid, she adopted me, and has regulated my deportment, controlled my appetite, and directed my outgoings and incomings. Recently that big brother of mine, for reasons yet to be explained, has handed me over, to her, body, and, I was going to say, soul. She treats me as a governess would a pupil, and I obey without a murmur."

"Father, she is incorrigible, and since her restoration to health, sadly needs reformation," replied Grace.

"Mr. Preston, if ever there was a conspiracy it exists between those two. Fortunately for me they are seized with a passion which is devouring them, while I grow gross and healthy," returned Flora with a clear ring of laughter.

"Father, you look as if you believe her. You might as well listen to a gypsy," said Grace.

"Miss McMillan, I believe every word you say. I recognize the vassalage under which you have been suffering, and, while I am here, license will take its stead. You shall go when you please, where you please, eat whatever you please, as much as you please, say what you please, and do what you please."

"Oh, I am so glad to have my freedom," almost shouted Flora.

"What is to become of my system of hygeia?" asked Grace.

"Throw that, where physic should go—to the dogs," said Mr. Preston.

"That will be nice. What a time I shall have. You are going to spend the balance of the season here, aren't you, Mr. Preston?" asked Flora.

"I am going to stay one day," replied Mr. Preston.

"One day!" exclaimed Grace and Flora in unison.

"Only one day. I must be in New York to-morrow at two p. m. That will necessitate my leaving on the late train to-night."

"Why, father, you will scarcely have time to see him," said Grace.

"Whom? See whom," asked Mr. Preston.

Grace looked at her father a few moments, her figure straightened, and in a half pout, she replied:

"George McMillan."

"Oh, I have already seen Mr. McMillan. He was waiting for me when the train arrived, and we walked to the hotel, a lame boy carrying my portmanteau. The morning was lovely. I could not bear getting into that old bus. Besides, he promised to call at ten o'clock, and it is now fifteen minutes of that hour. I must leave you that I may meet him."

"Well, go right now. There is nothing like promptness in this world," Grace replied.

I left Flora and Grace together and commenced a stroll of the corridors and verandas. I met Mr. Cowls who gave me a very sweet recognition, expressing his regret that he was unable to walk, else would crave the honor of accompanying me. I replied that I was weary of walking and would with pleasure be seated, if he would give me his society. He answered with as profound a bow as a man on crutches can make, and assured me that he deemed it a condescension. We took chairs and soon entered into a very free conversation. When I referred to the concert, he begged me to be sparing in my comments, as he felt that it but illy repaid us.

"Mr. Cowls," I said, "I enjoyed that concert hugely. She has one of the sweetest voices I ever heard. In very truth I was delighted and I know you must have been."

"Yes, I was. She delights me often—almost daily. I forget all my aches and pains when she sings," he replied.

"How long have you known the blind girl?" I asked.

"Three summers ago I made her acquaintance. It was early in the season and strangely brought about. You have observed the cripple boy who does chores? Oh, yes, I know you have. I have seen him talking to you many times. He made himself very useful to me, and one day when about to take my morning drive, I invited Racketts to go with me. While driving, my attention was attracted by the singing of a bird, and I stopped the horse to listen to the feathered prima donna. Turning to Racketts, I said, "Is not that very sweet?" "Yes," he replied, "but not as sweet as the blind girl sings."

"What blind girl?" I asked.

"Why, haven't you heard the blind girl?" he replied.

"No. Where does she live?"

"Over in the village, near the pool. There's trees all around the pool, and they're filled with birds, that are singing all the time till she commences, then the birds all stop and listen, cause she can beat 'em all, and they know it," he replied.

"Can you take me to her?" I asked.

"Not now. It's too late and too early. She only sings in the mornin's and evenin's. We can go this evenin', then you can hear her."

"No," said I, "we will go in the morning. You come to me to-morrow in the morning, early, and we will drive direct to her home."

"The next morning I was awake at dawn, and ready for my visit before the sun was up. Racketts was promptly on hand, and we drove to the blind girl's home. As we neared it, I heard what I thought was the

song of a bird trilling and quivering exquisite melodies. Racketts got out and spoke to her, and led her from her seat at the trunk of an oak, to where my buggy was standing. He introduced us and the girl sang for me. I dearly love music. 'It loosens the serpent which care has bound around my heart.' I visit the blind girl every day when the weather, and my ills permit, and she sings for me."

"And you are her patron?" I remarked.

" Oh, no, I endeavor merely to give some slight return for the pleasure she affords me. That's all. That's all."

Mr. Cowls is very entertaining company. He is a man of reading and much culture, familiar with the excellent things which have been written and said in all ages and in all climes. He is a storehouse of knowledge, and the hour I spent with him was most agreeable and valuable to me. I thanked him warmly and sincerely for the pleasure he had given me, and expresssed my regret that I had to leave him, while I begged that he would permit me to be a listener frequently hereafter.

The day slipped away very quietly, its smoothness interrupted, occasionally, by sighs from Grace. Mr. Preston and Mr. McMillan took a long walk, and, I suppose came to definite understandings on the subject which engrossed them. Afterward Grace appropriated her father. She sent for Sunbeam and exhibited her to him. While she talked, the child slipped from her knees and went out. Grace missed her and requested me to look for her. I was not long in finding her. Mrs. Kirkwood had her in her arms, while the doctor was

playing hide and seek with his face behind the shoulders of his wife. I reported to Grace. She merely remarked, "I would rather she were at her home. Her mother might need her."

Mr. Preston started to New York earlier than we expected, taking the five P. M. train. We accompanied him to the station.

CHAPTER XX.

"Like angels' visits, short and bright."

"We are going to the cottage to-night," said Grace, as she entered my room after tea. Mr. McMillan and Flora are going with us."

"Grace, I would rather not go," I replied.

"Who will Miss Flora have for company?" she asked.

"Oh, pardon, I had forgotten. Does Mr. McMillan know of the suffering and sorrow?"

"Yes. That is, he knows that there is a dying man there."

"I will be ready soon."

"They will be here in a few minutes. Is not the night beautiful?"

"Yes, but not so beautiful as was last night. I did not watch the closing day. Did the sunset compare with that of yesterday?"

"No, it did not. Perhaps we shall never again see such a glorious sunset as that of yesterday. I witnessed it with him, and its beauty and grandeur were enhanced by his presence and enriched by his eloquent tongue."

While we talked the McMillans came. In a few minutes we were strolling in the direction of the cottage, Grace and Mr. McMillan in advance. I did not think

it possible for people to walk so slowly. Flora and I had hard work to keep from stumbling on them. We adopted all expedients to keep behind them. Ever and anon we paused, looked out on the dark waves and listened to the low monotonous sound of their breaking on the sandy shore; scanned the heavens and pointed out the constellations, and still we were constantly on the heels of the lovers.

There was a death-like stillness around the cottage. The dense foliage of the waxy cedars threw shadows over the whole exterior of the little building. Through the leaves and vines which enshrouded the window in which the dying man lay, struggled the dim rays of a lamp. There was no sign of life. Grace went to the door and gently rapped. Mrs. Hastings answered.

"You, Miss Preston," in surprised voice.

"Yes, it is I. How is he?"

"Resting very easy. He is sleeping. Your rap did not awaken him. I will come out so as not to disturb him with our talk."

Grace stepped back to where Mr. McMillan was standing, and, Mrs. Hastings, gently drawing the door to a near close, followed. When she discovered tne presence of a gentleman, she excused herself, saying:

"I was not aware that you had company."

"Only a friend, an escort, and aunt and Flora. Mr. McMillan, Mrs. Hastings," said Grace.

"Mr. McMillan—Mr. McMillan," she repeated.

They stood together talking for a few minutes. It was evident to Grace that Mrs. Hastings was annoyed and discomposed by the presence of the male visitor, and she broke off the conversation with—

"Good night," and taking the arm of Mr. McMillan,

came to where Flora and I were standing in the dark shade of the cedars. Mrs. Hastings returned to her sorrowful vigils. Flora pointed out what she declared was a pair of eyes, shining bright in the shadow. Mr. McMillan went forward to discover the glistening something. He returned in a minute.

"Come quickly," assuring us that we had often seen the eyes before. We went on tip-toe. At the foot of a cedar, seated on a pad of old carpet, with back and head resting against the body of the tree, was Racketts, fast asleep, and close to his side sat the Major, with his eyes wide open. The boy's left arm encircled the dog. As Grace stopped, the Major gave her a look of recognition, and then licked the face of his sleeping master. Racketts opened his eyes, and with surprise said, "Why, Miss Grace."

"Racketts, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"Sleepin'. It's hunkie," he replied without rising.

"Why do you sleep here?" she asked.

"So as to be near her. It wouldn't do for her to be alone when he dies," replied the boy, rubbing his eyes.

"Why do you not sleep in the house?"

"Because she won't let me. I've begged her and begged her, but she won't. Says it's too hard for me, and that I must get my rest. She let me try sleepin' in the house, and just because I got up when he coughed, she wouldn't let me sleep there any more, but told me I must go to my bed at the hotel."

"Have you a bed at the hotel?" asked Grace, her voice just above a whisper.

"Yes, indeed, a nice one. Mr. Cowls pays for it, and he was angry at me 'till I told him why, and then he

said, 'All right, my boy, all right, Racketts,' and it is, so it is."

"I cannot see how you sleep at all in that way, seated on the ground and resting against the tree," said Grace.

"As I said afore, somebody must be near her when he dies in the night, and I sleeps here so as to be near."

"How long have you been doing this?"

"Since it quit rainin'. Afore that I slept under the stoop."

"Little use you will be were he to die. You will continue to sleep."

"Oh, no, Miss Grace. The Major, he knows. He kisses me awake when there is any noise in that room. Then I gets up and creeps to the window and peeps through the vines, and watches her raise his head, and wipe his mouth, and put the wet cloth on his forehead, and then I know the time hasn't come yet, and Major and I goes back to bed. He wakes me often, 'cause he is afraid it will be so quiet that hardly any of us'll know."

There was a pause for a few moments, when Grace continued speaking apparently without thinking.

"Then you will remain here to-night?"

"Yes, Miss Grace. To-night and next night and every night till he dies. Don't tell her, else she'll make me go to the hotel."

"Good night, Racketts," said Grace, and we all repeated, "good night."

"Good night, Miss Grace. Good night all," was the reply.

As we turned to the path, Racketts called Grace to say, "When the Major licked my face I was havin' a hunkie dream."

"Come to-morrow morning and tell it to me," she replied.

As we walked, Grace said:

"How little we know of life, its sufferings, its sacrifices, its devotions, its heroisms. Who would have thought that such tenderness and devotion had their home in that cripple boy's heart?"

Flora commenced to sob, and taking hold of my arm, said:

"Let us hurry back."

"What did you say that woman's name is?" asked Mr. McMillan of Grace.

"Mrs. Hastings," she replied.

"Hastings," he repeated. "I had a sister whose married name was Hastings, but she is dead, years ago. Gave up her life that a son might be born. The sacrifice was in vain. The babe died and was buried with its mother. Hastings—Hastings—what memories that name awakens!"

Flora pulled me along, and we were soon out of hearing. When midway to the hotel Flora stopped suddenly and said—

"What is that? Listen!"

It was someone singing in low tones, and the air was "The Home of the Soul." Racketts' and Sunbeam's "Uncle Tom" and Grace's "pioneer" soon came up. As he recognized us he said:

"Been to the cottage, have you?" he answered and asked.

"Yes," I replied. "The night is beautiful—so much like day, that we determined to visit the sick. Miss Grace and Mr. McMillan are following."

"No worse, I guess?"

"No, he's resting comfortably, is asleep. We did not go in lest we wake him."

"That is good. I will return with you, and, perhaps, go later. I visit there every night and judge of his ability to live until morning. There ought to be someone near when he dies. It would be a fearful thing for that poor woman to be alone with her dead."

"She will not be alone. Racketts is near her though she does not know it," I replied, and then related when and where we found the crippled boy.

"If Racketts were as big and healthy in body as he is in heart, what a giant would be on the earth. I never met such a boy—so illiterate, yet so full of common sense. He has a heart full of tenderness and a disposition so Christ-like, that he is a teacher to us all. Crippled and poor, he realizes neither, except as they interfere with his desires to provide for his old mother, or help those who are poorer or more wretched than himself. His old mother is his story, and a sweet one it is. When I return to the west, I am going by way of New York, for no other reason than to call upon his mother. The mother of such a boy must be more than an ordinary woman." Uncle Tom seemed terribly in earnest.

We continued our way to the hotel, and, as we had an escort in Uncle Tom McElroy, we did not wait for the loiterers, who followed slowly. I stopped when I reached the veranda, in response to the salutation of Mr. Cowls, who was standing and waiting for some one—perhaps Mr. Potts. We talked for a few minutes and then I bade him good night. He hobbled off intent, no doubt, on finding his elixir for sleep, in meeting his "block." We heard a rapid step behind us, and in an instant Mr. Primrose held out his hand to Flora, saying:

"This is the first time I have been down, and I have been looking for you everywhere."

"I did not expect you out so soon after the dreadful fright you received from that dog. It was enough to put you to bed for a month," said Flora.

"It was indeed. The horrid beast. There must be a law against dogs at watering places, or I won't come here. I wish you had come sooner. I brought down my pantaloons to show you the tear which that dog made when I was attacked a year ago; but I got tired carrying them, and mother took them up to my room."

"Your mother has good sense. Good night, Mr. Primrose," said Flora.

He stood without responding. Something was trying to get through his brain, but could not.

I determined to wait for Grace. I could see her and Mr. McMillan standing on the beach, quite near where the waves were breaking. I was scarcely seated when Uncle Tom McElroy begged permission to be seated on a chair near me.

"I am going to call you, Miss Rebecca, if the familiarity does not displease you."

"Do so, and I will be pleased," I replied.

"I am an old man, not given to fashion nor formality. People whom I like, get places in my heart, and once there I treat them as if they were old acquaintances."

"Am I to understand that I am there," I asked with a smile.

"Oh, yes, alongside of Miss Grace. She comes pretty near filling a heart. I think she completely fills one, but that away. Hearts, as they grow old, increase

in capacity. There is room in mine for all who suffer or who love."

"But I am neither a sufferer nor a lover," I protested.

"You are both. Nothing escapes my observation when there is heart work to do. I am familiar with your suffering and have seen exhibitions of your love. Both were shown at the cottage the day I met you leaving it. They told me of your words of comfort, and your heart work. I have a place for you in my heart."

"I am glad you have so honored me. My companions there will all be sweet and loving for I am sure there are no occupants save those who suffer and who love."

"None," he replied as Mr. McMillan and Grace stepped to our sides. I was sorry of the interruption. I wanted to hear Uncle Tom discourse on suffering and love. It is only postponed however. I will lead him to the subject when I meet him."

After talking a few minutes we bade the gentlemen good night and went to our rooms. Grace was silent, seemingly busy with her thoughts. She gave mechanical answers to the questions I asked. At last I said:

"Grace, what are you thinking about?"

"Of Racketts," she replied.

"Of anybody else?"

"Yes, of many people and things. Was thinking of life and death—of the brief present and the endless future—of the wide boundless prospects, with which, in my imagination, I surround my future life, brief as it must be, when longest—my heart's desires gratified, and hopes fulfilled. Was thinking of the narrow view before the earthly vision of the dying Hastings. My life just be-

ginning, his ending. Ending, did I say? Should I not have said, beginning? Oh, the unknown, the unknown. I must stop thinking of these things. I get so bewildered. All must suffer and love. There is no escape. We were born to suffer and love, and God has so indissolubly connected them that the one cannot exist without the other. So I will suffer and love, and love and suffer, and be content."

CHAPTER XXI.

"I have had a dream."

As we left our rooms for breakfast we met Racketts coming.

"Why, you are early, Racketts."

"Yes, Miss Grace, I wanted to get through soon, so I could go to my work," he replied.

"What have you to do?"

"Help at the cottage, you know."

"Yes, I know. But what have you to do here?"

"My dream. I came to tell you my dream."

"Sure enough. I had forgotten about your dream. Was it a good one?"

"Yes, indeed. Just hunkie, but wakin' me broke it off."

"You go into our rooms and wait until we have taken breakfast. We will not be long. Take the Major with you."

As we came from breakfast Mr. McMillan was waiting for Grace.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

"Yes, when it is your pleasure," he replied.

"You must be patient a brief while. I have an engagement which I had forgotten. Made it in your presence, with Racketts, to listen to his dream. He is

waiting in my room to tell it, and I cannot disappoint him."

"Certainly, you should listen to him?"

"Do you believe in dreams?" she quizzically asked.

"No, though I confess I have been much worried by some I have had, which were followed by almost identical events."

"I too. But more anon."

"Now, Racketts, give us the dream," said Grace, seating herself near the crippled boy.

His eyes grew large and his face pale, as he commenced.

"I was in Heaven."

"In Heaven?" repeated Grace.

"Yes, I died and went to Heaven. I wasn't sick long. I was playing with Sunbeam, when all at once I had a pain, and I died and went to Heaven. When I got to the gate I saw a man standin' there and I was afraid and stopped. Then the man said, 'Is you Racketts? and I said, 'Yes, sir, I is.' Then he said, 'There's an old lady inside waitin' for you.' 'Is they,' said I, and he said 'Yes, there is.' The Major was with me and I looked at the man, and then at the poor little dog, what appeared lost, thinkin' I was goin' to leave him, and I said to the man, 'May I?' and he smiled and said 'Yes, you may take him along with you.' So I picked him up, and in I walked. Who do you think was there waitin' for me? Why, my mother. The dear old soul had got there jist a little while afore me, but she knew I was comin' and was waitin' for me. So I jist dropped the Major and jumped into her arms. Wasn't she glad? She kissed me over and over again, so many times. I wasn't crippled any more, but like the other

boys, an mother wasn't old any more, but young and beautiful like you. Then she kissed me again and said she'd only been waitin' a little while an' hadn't seen the place yet, an' the Major was so glad, an' acted jist as he does when we go home from here, an' he jumped an' barked, an' the people standin' around laughed an' clapped their hands, an' jist as we were startin' up the beautiful street, Major kissed me awake, an' you was standin' there an' my dream broke off."

"That was a very sweet dream," said Grace. "And your good old mother was waiting for you?"

"Yes, but she wasn't old any more, but young and beautiful, and I wasn't crippled. Didn't have my crutch. I left that behind."

"And so you will, my dear boy. There are no crutches in Heaven. Did you see Mr. Hastings?"

"No, he hadn't got there yet, 'cause I know he'd been waitin' for me."

"I'm sure he would have been," said Grace. "Your dream was lovely, and it will all come true one of these days. You will die and go to Heaven, and you will meet your mother there. She will not be old, but young and beautiful, as you saw her in your dream."

"Do you think they will let me take the Major in with me?" asked Racketts.

"I don't see why they should not," replied Grace.

"I wish that same man would be at the gate. He looked so kind, and doesn't hate little dogs."

"Oh, I guess the same man will be there. They don't change gate keepers."

"Now, I must go," said Racketts. "She'll be wonderin' what keeps me, for I said I'd only be gone a little while. She is not fit to work this mornin'. After you

was there last night he had terrible coughin' spells, and she was up nearly all night. So was the Major an' me, but we can stand it better than her. Good mornin'."

"Good morning, Racketts," we both said, as he dragged himself from the room.

"Poor little fellow," sighed Grace.

"Heaven would not be Heaven to him if the Major was refused admission," I remarked.

"Yes, yes," she answered, and then added, "Mr. McMillan is waiting for me. I am going to take a sail."

"You take a sail?" I said in astonishment.

"Yes."

"Why, you have always refused to get into a sail boat. Not only here, but at all other places."

"That is true. I never had confidence in the sailing master," she naively replied.

"Who is to sail the boat?" I asked.

"George McMillan."

"What do you know of his qualities as a sailor?"

"He says he can sail her, and I believe him."

"As in love, so in sailing. You believe every word he says to you."

"Yes. It is sweet to believe him."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Indefinite. Get back for dinner I guess. In the meantime you step up to the cottage and see how they are. I was there this morning before six o'clock. He is weaker and cannot last much longer." Saying which she hurried down stairs to meet Mr. McMillan.

I watched them from my window as they pushed from the shore. Mr. McMillan set the sails, and the canvassed boat started off like a bird, skimming the waters, bounding through the crested waves like a thing

of life. Strange thoughts filled my mind. What will the future bring to the couple in the boat. Will there be storms and tempests in their lives, or will they sail under trade winds, with peace and safety guiding the craft. Every family has a coast or turbulent sea, on which some of its voyagers have been wrecked. Wisely the future is withheld from us. It is enough to bear our burdens when they come. Could we raise the veil behind which the future hides her terrors, we would not have strength to love—we would be consumed by suffering.

I concluded that I would walk the verandas. Just as I passed, Flora McMillan came from her room, and in a moment had her arms around my neck.

"Where are you bound for?"

"Nowhere in particular. I thought I would walk the verandas."

"I will walk with you. Look, there comes Mr. Primrose. He shall be our escort."

"Flora, you inveterate tease, do treat him with some consideration. He has been raised a pet, and is not so much responsible for his weaknesses as is his mother," I remarked.

"It wont hurt him."

He seemed in a listless mood, and almost stumbled on us before he observed who we were.

"Oh, Mr. Primrose, how fortunate that we meet you. We want company. We are going to peep into all the faces on the veranda. You will accompany us?" said Flora.

"With great pleasure, ladies. I was thinking of you, Miss McMillan, when I almost stepped on you," he drawled.

"I'm glad you did not," dropping her glove, just as he turned. We took a step or two forward, and he put himself in position to pick up the glove. It was a measured performance. She threw her hand to her mouth and said:

"The light in the hall is bad, and the grace of the movement is lost."

"You are cruel," I replied.

"Kind, you mean. He likes service. Not two generations back his entire family were in it."

"Miss McMillan, your hands are very nervous, aren't they?" as he handed her the glove.

"Very," she said, as her fan dropped.

His left leg flew to the rear with sudden quickness, and not half the time was spent in lifting the fan as was taken in lifting the glove. As he handed it to her he said:

"This is awful. I'm afraid I will burst a blood vessel. You ought to have your things fastened to you somehow, so they couldn't fall so frequently."

"It is a good suggestion, of which I had not thought. I must attach them to my person, and not trouble my gentlemen friends."

At this point his mother called him, and he reluctantly went to her.

"He is getting weary in my service," said Flora.

"He should. It is like putting him on the rack."

We took the lower verandas and Mr. Primrose did not return. An hour was spent strolling them, but no incident of moment or interest occurred. We talked and talked, most of which was about Mr. McMillan and Grace.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It were strange indeed were that so."

I went to the cottage as Grace requested. Was in the sick room only a few minutes. Found Uncle Tom McElroy there, seated by the bedside. He had been reading. An open bible was lying on his knees, and I interrupted his fervent talk by my entrance. After a few words of commonplace, he renewed his talk. He was talking of the last sorrowful walk of the Master and his companions from Jerusalem to Bethany. His descriptive powers are wonderful. The picture was so vividly drawn, that, with my mental vision, I could see the bowed heads and girded loins of the Master and his companions, in the evening shade, walking the dusty road. Could almost hear the beating of the hearts of the disappointed disciples and feel their longing for rest and a place to lay their weary heads. As Uncle Tom talked the dying man twitched his fingers. That was the only sign of life about him except his eyes. They were larger, fuller and brighter, and had a world of meaning in their penetrating gaze. Sunbeam was sitting on a lounge with her doll pressed to her breast, while she swayed to and fro, lulling it to sleep in quietest tones. I took a seat at her side, when she whispered to me, "Dolly is very ill." In a few minutes I went out to Mrs. Hastings. She met me with a kiss and a slight smile, saying—

"I am glad you have called."

Racketts was rubbing some laces, and paused in his work only to say "Miss Rebecca." Mrs Hastings was much exhausted, and should have been in her bed instead of at work. She detailed to me the weary night watch through which she had passed, and I wondered at her endurance. To love, nothing is labor or sacrifice.

"Who was the gentleman with Miss Grace last night?" she asked.

"George McMillan, and the young lady, who was with me, is his sister Flora," I remarked.

"Where is their home?"

"Wisconsin."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, they have frequently referred to it in conversation."

"My mother's name was McMillan. The family lived in Buffalo. There had been other children but they died in infancy. I was the only child which lived."

"What was your maiden name?"

"Hastings," she replied.

"The same as your husband's?"

She paused for several moments and then answered:

"Hastings."

"Can it be possible that Mr. McMillan is your relative?" I asked.

"Oh, no. That were a miracle. There is not the slightest possibility of relationship between us. My mother died when I was a child nine years of age. I recollect her with wonderful distinctness. Daily, in spirit, she walks at my side, looking into my face with her dear sweet eyes, and consoling me in my distress. Last night when Mr. McMillan spoke in answer to the

introduction, I thought my mother's voice filled my ears; but it was my imagination. The name prompted the thought."

While she talked I thought of the inquiry Mr. McMillan made of Grace, and the conversation which followed. He repeated the name "Hastings" several times —spoke of a wedded sister who bore that name. Can it be possible that these people are relatives? I did not mention to Mrs. Hastings the fact that Mr. McMillan had made inquiries, or that he had told us that his sister had married a Hastings. I will relate the incident to Grace.

"I would like to take Sunbeam to the hotel. Grace has gone sailing," I remarked."

"Yes, she may go with you. Sunbeam, put away dolly. Miss Duncan wants you to go with her to the hotel."

"Yes, mamma, I will go. But don't you think the walk will do dolly good, she's so unwell?" said the little sweetness, as she held the doll from her and gazed into its face. It was arranged, of course, that dolly should accompany us, for the benefit of her health.

Flora met us as we were passing to our room and came in. She sympathized with Sunbeam and the sick doll. Her ladyship was disrobed and put into Grace's bed. Diagnosis after diagnosis was made by Flora, in her endeavor to discover the disease afflicting her. Finally it was determined that she was suffering from an attack of heartache. There was but one cure, and that was a lover.

"Miss Grace must be told all about it. She knows so much," said Sunbeam.

"Why of course she must. She will provide a

cure. She knows exactly how to find a lover," said Flora, laughing and turning to me as a voucher.

Here we were interrupted by the bell-boy who brought a note to Flora. It was from Mr. Primrose inviting her to take a drive. He said he would be pleased to give her an airing, and that while he could not sail a boat, he could drive horses. After reading it she said:

"You will not drive me, Mr. Primrose. I am not ready to go to my death."

"Have you not confidence in him as a whip?" I asked.

"No, nor anything else. I will punish him for growing weary in my service. I will never forget nor forgive that suggestion, to fasten to my person my handkerchief, glove and fan."

"You are growing malignant."

"No, only justly revengeful," she replied with a laugh.

She wrote an immediate reply. It was couched in excuses and hints. Did not like carriage riding, but was fond of horseback exercise. Detested dusty roads, but was in love with the rolling billows. A sail was the most delightful of all pleasures, and she was so in love with the ocean, that she hoped in the near future to make here home where she could hear its moaning and roaring at pleasure.

"Don't you think that will make him hungry for the sea?" she asked.

"I do not. You should have seen him the night of the great storm. Fear possessed him, and he upbraided his mother for bringing him to the coast. Water and dogs are his aversion."

"Well, he must fall in love with the sea and give me indubitable evidence thereof, by sailing alone in the frailest of barks, or he must give me up. I'll have none of him if he is afraid of the sea," and she tossed her pretty head as if she meant it.

Sunbeam came sliding up to me as if she wanted something which she did not like to name.

"Is dolly worse?" I asked.

"No, Miss, she is better, but she wants to visit Mrs. Kirkwood. I think that would make her well."

"You do?"

"Yes, Miss Rebecca, I am sure it would."

"Well, put up your mouth that I may kiss you, and then you may gratify Miss Dolly's desire to visit Mrs. Kirkwood. Now kiss Miss Flora and you may go."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Life is a tragedy to those who feel."

I fell asleep and was wakened by Flora's exclaiming:

"They are returning."

"Who?" I asked.

"Grace and brother. Come, you can see them from the window."

I took a glance at them, and then we hurried to the beach and gave them a reception of handkerchief and parasol waving. As Grace sprang ashore, she said:

"It was delicious."

"All things are delicious when you two are together and alone," replied Flora with a shrug of her shoulders.

"You are a little goose, my dear," responded Grace.

The talk was interrupted by an uproar at the hotel. There was shouting and running of people. The tide was out and we started for the brow of the beach to discover the cause of the alarm. It was a runaway. A pair of horses attached to a carriage were coming furiously in our direction from the road leading to the village.

"It is the Primroses!" exclaimed Flora.

True enough, it was. While we gazed young Primrose dropped the reins from his hands and jumped from the vehicle.

"Oh, the coward! And he wanted me to accompany him," said Flora. As he lit on the ground he turned a complete somersault, and lay there. The speed of the runaways increased. They came tearing toward the hotel like a fury. We could see Mrs. Primrose lying between the seats, like a bundle, having fainted, apparently. At this moment Grace screamed and started for the highway. Mr. McMillan had seen the danger first, and was half way to the roadway. Sunbeam had left the hotel to join us, but when she saw the runaway horses, childlike, she turned and started back to the hotel. She would have been safe had she continued her way to us. Turning back put her in most imminent peril. What precious things are seconds. We never realize their value except when some startling incident or event is resting on their wings. On came the horses with the speed of a tempest. Each instant brought them nearer to the child. In another moment she would be under their feet. Mr. McMillan shouted, Grace screamed, and I stood fixed to the sands. The child in her fright saw nothing, heard nothing, but stood dumb and still in the path of the coming destruction. Her death must be instant. Grace fell to the earth, hiding her face in her hands. At this consummate moment a crutch was seen in the air, and a body struck the child when the horses' heads seemed over her, knocking her from under their heels. The child was safe, but the sharp iron bound hoofs cut the rescuing object down, and left it lying in a cloud of dust. In another moment Mr. McMillan had grasped the bridle of one of the horses, with such power as to throw it from its feet. In falling it struck its mate, and both horses were down. When the dust cleared away, there lay Racketts, bleeding and un-

conscious. Mr. McMillan picked the boy up and carried him to the hotel veranda. As he laid him down, Mr. Cowls, in great excitement, exclaimed:

"Oh, my God! Is there life in him? Is there life in him? Where is the physician? Run for him. Run for him," swinging his crutches as though he would strike if not obeyed. "Run for him. What are your legs for?"

"Potts is coming with him," some one exclaimed.

"God bless Potts. He is the only man who has a head. God bless Potts," cried Mr. Cowls.

It was Dr. Kirkwood who came. Grace seated herself on the floor and took Racketts' head in her lap. She bathed his temples with water at the direction of Dr. Kirkwood. In a few minutes Racketts opened his eyes and recognizing Grace, smiled. His eyes closed and there came faintly from his lips—"Mother, mother, my poor mother."

"Yes, his poor mother. Yes. Oh, God, spare him for his poor mother's sake. Yes," said Mr. Potts.

"God bless you, Potts. I hope your prayer will be answered. I say amen to it," said Mr. Cowls.

His consciousness lasted but a few moments. Grace called him by name—told him, "Here is Sunbeam," all the time bathing his temples and wiping the blood from the wounds on his face and head which the iron hoofs of the horses made.

"He will die. He is dead," said Mr. Cowls.

"No, he still lives, yes, I hope he will recover, yes. I loved the boy. Yes," said Mr. Potts.

"Thank you, Potts, thank you. God bless you.

You are a man with a heart—a great big heart," said Mr. Cowls.

Again the wounded boy opened his eyes. Sunbeam had kissed his pale lips. He smiled, but no word came from him. Life ebbed away again. His eyes closed and his face grew pale. Grace began to sob, while tears streamed from her eyes. Her hand was resting over his heart. The beating could not be felt.

"He is dead," she wailed.

As if he had heard her, his eyes opened and his lips moved, and in a merely audible voice he said, "My dream—My mother—Major——." His lips ceased to move. His eyes did not close, but the light went out of them. His jaws slightly parted. He was dead.

Grace's head fell forward, tears gushed from her eyes and rained on the face of the dead boy. Mr. McMillan gently removed the head from her lap and lifted her to her feet, throwing his arm around her, with a movement of his head, indicated to us to follow.

"Help me, Potts—I am too weak to walk. Help me, Potts," pleaded Mr. Cowls.

"Yes. It's very trying on you. Yes. Put your arm around my neck. Yes. That's the way. Yes. Now drop your crutches. Yes. It's very trying on you. Yes. You are bleeding inwardly. Yes," saying which he picked Mr. Cowls from the floor as if he had been an infant, and carried him to his room.

Mr. McMillan, when we reached our rooms, left us, saying he would take charge of the body of the dead Racketts. We laid Grace exhausted and almost hysterical on her bed. She sobbed and sighed as if her heart would break, and I became so interested in her

condition that I forgot everything else. Flora, in the deepest emotion, lay at the side of Grace, helpless as an infant.

"Bring Sunbeam to me," said Grace.

I immediately went in search of her. As I passed along the veranda I met Mr. McMillan, who held a telegram in his hand.

"Here is something which will add to our sorrow, and still more excite our wonder."

"What is it?" I asked in alarm.

"It is a telegram from New York, requesting Mr. Potts to send the body of Racketts to that city, and gives the intelligence that the boy's mother died instantly an hour ago."

"His mother dead!" I exclaimed.

"So it is telegraphed," he replied. "While sailing to-day Grace told me of the boy's dream. Now it is all fulfilled."

"Yes," I said, "It is strangely verified. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction."

We hurried to Grace. Mr. McMillan read the telegram. Grace clasped her hands and said:

"Oh, is it true? Can it be true? I am so glad. His dream is fulfilled, with his mother in Heaven. The 'dear old soul,' as he spoke of her. Oh, I am so glad. He will have but one disappointment. The last word he uttered was a call for the Major."

"He will not be disappointed in that. If dogs have souls the Major is with them. When the fallen horses were released, the little dog was found in the dust crushed to death," said Mr. McMillan.

Grace sprang from her seat, pressing back her disheveled hair, she exclaimed—

"Oh, I am so glad. All three there. The mother, and Racketts and the Major."

"I believe they are together," said Mr. McMillan.

"Of course they are. Why should they not be?" asked Grace.

No one disputed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

*Heaven—amazing brightness * * * and everlasting love.*

When the runaway horses were stopped by Mr. McMillan, Mrs. Primrose, in a semi-conscious state, was taken from between the seats. She was quickly restored and the first words she uttered were:

"Where is my dear boy?" showing the most motherly solicitude, "Where is my dear boy?" she continued. "Is he killed? I'll go mad if he is dead."

One of those who aided in restoring her made answer by pointing to where her dear boy was limping toward them, having sustained no injury from the jump he made, except, a sprained ankle. In a few moments they were together. She threw her arms around him and cried for joy.

"Don't do that," he said, pressing her away from him. "You will hurt me more. I'm nearly dead now," not manifesting the slightest return of affection. "What did you tell me to jump for? I knew I should get hurt."

"Oh, my dear boy, I was afraid you would be killed. I urged you to jump to save your precious life," she replied, still clinging to him.

"I knew somebody would stop them anyhow. If I had stayed in I wouldn't have sprained my ankle. I'll never jump again when you tell me."

"No, my dear son, you will not. We will never

trust ourselves to vicious horses again. I am so thankful that you are alive."

"I'm not. Yes I am, but I wish I had stayed in the carriage."

Leaning on his mother, he half hopped to the hotel. They saw the crowd around the body of Racketts, but they made neither pause nor inquiry. They knew only the misfortune that had befallen themselves.

Mrs. Kirkwood sent Sunbeam to Grace with a note that she was unable to pacify her. The little dear was still sobbing and moaning. The appearance of the child did much to compose Grace. She took her in her arms and began walking the floor, telling her of Racketts' new home

"Then he is in Heaven?" said Sunbeam.

"Yes," replied Grace, he is in Heaven, and his mother is there with him. She is waiting for him, just inside the gate."

"There is where papa is going. Uncle Tom told Racketts and me that papa was going there."

"He will soon see Racketts," answered Grace, drawing the child close to her breast. This soothed and quieted the little one. In a few minutes she said:

"I must go and get dolly."

"Where is she?" asked Grace.

"In bed. Mrs. Kirkwood and I put her to bed so I could go and meet you. She was sick too."

"Well, go and get her and then come to me. I want to take you home. I must see your father and mother."

I accompanied Grace when she took the child home. Mrs. Hastings had just heard of the death of Racketts and the tears were washing her eyes. She

was greatly concerned about Sunbeam, but had no person to send after her, and so, she was compelled to remain with the new sorrow added to the old ones. After discussion it was concluded that it were better not to tell Mr. Hastings of the death of Racketts, lest it might hasten his own death, and so we dried our tears as best we could, and made an attempt at composure before we entered his room. Poor Mrs. Hastings! Nothing could add to the forlornness of her manner. Her cup was full to overflowing, and she entered the room like one lost in grief.

He was no better. If anything a little worse. Uncle Tom McElroy was seated at the bedside, and had been there for hours, fanning the dying man and describing anew the glories into which he would soon enter.

We talked a little. There was more disposition to listen than talk, and Uncle Tom continued his consolations and his mercy work. Mrs. Hastings relieved him, finally, and he accompanied us when we left. On the way to the hotel we told him of the death of Racketts and the death of his mother. He was greatly shocked, and for some moments gazed at us without speaking.

"God is merciful. His goodness passeth our understanding. This morning when I was taking my walk on the beach, Racketts came to me. As we walked he told me of his dream. I told him it would all come true, if he continued the good boy he was. He replied that he felt it would, and then asked:

"How soon will it be?"

"That is God's secret,' I replied. But I never thought of such an early realization of it. The fulfillment has made me weak. I can scarcely walk. I feel

a vacant place in my heart, and I guess you know what I mean, for you each had him in yours. I am glad his mother is dead. His death would have been a terrible blow to her. Racketts was all she had in her heart, and he dead, desolation alone would have been there."

"Yes," said Grace, "and the Major too. He is dead. Killed as I told you. They are all together, don't you think?"

Uncle Tom paused a moment, and then answered slowly:

"Yes, all together."

We talked all the way to the hotel, and Uncle Tom grew eloquent as he spoke of the boy's heart and works.

We had not seen Mr. McMillan from the time he brought the telegram to Grace. He took possession of the body, and directed its preparation for removal to New York. In this he was largely assisted by Dr. Kirkwood, who insisted on providing everything and paying for everything. Poor Mrs. Kirkwood was greatly exercised and prompted and seconded her husband in all he did. Her grief and sympathy proved that my estimate of her character was correct.

It was night before his shroud was finished and he was wrapped in it and laid in the coffin. Mr. McMillan took us to see him. The face was marble like, and the expression sweet with no evidence of suffering. The hair was combed forward instead of parted at the side. Grace complained that the style was unnatural. Mr. McMillan gently parted the hair and a great wound was exposed.

"It is better as it is," said Grace, as she knelt and kissed the cold lips, then gave way to her emotion.

We led her back to her room, and, sobbing, she threw herself on her bed.

It was arranged that Mr. McMillan should accompany the body to New York and attend to the burial. The telegram announcing the death of Racketts' mother had been answered, and the fact stated that Racketts had been killed by an accident, with the request that the body of the mother should not be interred until the arrival of his remains. It was further stated that Dr. Kirkwood had telegraphed his banker to employ an undertaker to take charge of all matters connected with the burial. He would pay all expenses. The old doctor also telegraphed his pastor to perform all rites and ceremonies.

The next morning we all arose early. Grace and Flora and I ordered flowers from the village florist. A wreath and a cross, which were laid on the coffin. Just before removing it to the train the guests were offered opportunity to view the remains. The only violent exhibition of emotion was made by Sunbeam. Dr. Kirkwood lifted her from the floor so that she might see the face of the dead boy. She burst into tears, and cried as only a child can. Mrs. Kirkwood tried to quiet her, but she herself gave way to tears. The old doctor picked up Sunbeam, and then tendering his other arm to his wife, left for their rooms.

While the viewing of the dead body was going on, I observed Mr. Potts coming and going from the room very frequently. He invariably looked at the dead boy, and then at those present, but spoke to no one. I followed him out and said:

"You appear nervous and restless, Mr. Potts."

"Do I? Yes. Well, I'm not. I'm only carrying

the proceedings to him. Yes. He's not able to come down. Yes, I offered to carry him down as I carried him up. Yes. But he won't. He keeps me running backward and forward, telling him how the dead boy looks, and what the people are saying and doing. Yes. He's very much interested in all. Yes. Told me he loved me. Yes. That he loved everybody. Yes. I do everything he wants me to do. Yes. I don't worry him. Yes. Heartache is worse than boneache, yes, and he's got it. Yes. Got it bad, very bad, yes."

"We are all suffering from it," I said.

"Yes, all suffering from it. Yes. And so we should. Yes. All suffering from it," he continued to repeat as he hurried in the direction of Mr. Cowls' room.

It was a sad day. I stayed most of the time in my room, and Flora McMillan kept me company. She grows sweeter every day, and I am getting very fond of her. Grace spends most of the day at the cottage. When evening came we went to our beds with aching hearts. Flora remained with us for the night, preferring to do so rather than to go to her room, saying that her heart was desolate and she needed company.

CHAPTER XXV.

"In my sufficient grace is found
The strength to do,
And in my breast a rest
The world can't give to you."

My heart is weary and my head is aching, yet there is sweetness in the pain, and comfort in the weariness. Rather contradictory to have an aching heart with sweetness in it, and a weary head filled with comfort. Nevertheless, it is so. Sorrow which is so tempered with joy, is no longer sorrow, but sweet contentment. A grief, where each pang is softened by a balm, takes away the sting and leaves in its stead a joy.

This is the second day since the body of Racketts was taken to New York, and what a day it has been! Every moment of the hours, weighted to fulness with important incident, has gone into the hereafter as the most memorable of my life. My tablets are full of notes, many of them almost illegible, they are so blurred and blotted.

Just after breakfast Grace got a telegram from Mr. McMillan that he had started from New York. Grace and I went to the beach. There was no burning, blistering sun parching the sand, and heating the air as though it had passed through a furnace. A filmy sheet of mist, looking like a compressed fog, overspread the sky. Below this sheet were flocks of sheep clouds, scudding

lazily but steadily westward, as if seeking some cote where they might huddle close together, finding rest from the storm, of which the weather-wise say they are harbingers. The waves had a regular roll and sweep, and broke on the shore as though they were weary of their long journey. Far as the eye could reach, a placid calm rested on the face of the great deep, and the gulls and other sea birds swept so close to the surface, that, at times, they appeared to be skimming the water. The atmosphere was smoky, and reminded me of early autumn days, gray and soft, which come to us as benedictions after the torrid heat of summer. Such days bring thoughtfulness to me, and I pause in the busy hum of life and examine myself. My inner life then claims me, and asks for a reckoning, demanding that I account for my opportunities and my possibilities. I make answer to the summons, pleading woman's weakness as an excuse for my shortcomings. I pray that the Merciful Father will remember my strivings and be tolerant to my failures, knowing as He does, how hard I have striven, and how little I have done. I was wakened from this reverie by Grace humming a tune. It was "The Home of the Soul," and she hummed as though she had gotten it from Uncle Tom McElroy's nose. I said:

"Grace, what tune is that you are humming?"

"The Home of the Soul," she stopped long enough to reply, and then resumed it.

"Where did you learn it?"

"From a dear old friend," she answered.

"I have heard him hum it often. You find good companionship in Uncle Tom?"

"Yes, the very sweetest," she replied.

"I saw you and him together at the end of the veranda early this morning. What were you talking about?"

"Be patient, dear aunt. You will see ere long."

"I am offended at the manner in which you treat me. You should confide in me, but you do not. On the occasion of my first visit to the cottage, you treated me as though I were your servant, and not your companion and your aunt. I went alone into the presence of Mrs. Hastings—remained there alone, and on returning to the room of the sick man, you never so much as noticed me. To attract your attention I said, 'Grace, I am going,' and you replied, 'Well, go,' as if you were an icicle and I entitled to no respectful treatment."

"You poor, dear, old dear," she said, throwing her arms around my neck and kissing me. "I would not hurt your feelings for the world. When I do so thoughtlessly, as I am sure I did on the occasion referred to, though it never entered my thoughts that I had, I am willing to fall at your feet and ask forgiveness."

"Oh, Grace, stop. Don't say another word. I m a poor helpless kind of body, incompetent to good offices. I could not have helped that morning. I became bewildered while with Mrs. Hastings. What could I have done for the dying man? Nothing."

"Aunt Rebecca, you are my love and my life. What would I have been without you? A constant care, I have been self-willed and difficult to control. Your sweetness has effected many things for my good. You are companion, counsellor, friend, guide, everything, and all in all. In my humors I laugh at your counsel, but I am sure to follow it. Ridicule your fears and then

adopt them myself. You are my eyes and my ears, and my brain and my heart. You are the author of all the good I bear. Your sweetness has molded my character. Now, while I confess all this, there are times when I like to take a step in anticipation of what you would have me do. Sometimes, you know, I have to argue with you, and you know I dislike argument. An end which your reason would reach, my perception perceives. With me, frequently, impulse is quicker and better than reason. Reason is such a tyrant—so exacting. Whys and wherefores are stumbling blocks to me. I do not claim that I have made no mistakes, but when has an act of mine caused you, or me, pain or even annoyance? Now, in the event of certain things occurring, I will have a sweet surprise for you. I cannot communicate it now, for it rests on a contingency. Indeed, I could not if I desired, for I am bound to confidence. By and by, my dear old aunt, you shall know all."

"Very well, I will abide in patience until such time as your surprise ripens," I replied.

"Oh, you will be supremely happy, for I shall be. The incident shall be so in keeping with your heart's desire, that it will run over in very gladness. By and by, dearie," she closed, patting my cheeks and pushing back the hair from my brow. As she ceased talking she turned toward the cottage.

"There comes Sunbeam," she said. The child was walking as if she were dizzy or blind, swaying from one side of the path to the other, and stumbling apparently on nothing.

"Hurry, Sunbeam, I am waiting for a kiss," called Grace as she beckoned to the child, but the steps of the

little one did not quicken. The same swaying and staggering marked them. Grace turned to me, her face full of anxiety and inquiry, but I could not make response. We waited in silence until the child came into the room. Her pretty sweet face was almost scalded with tears. She reached her little hand to Grace and said:

"I came to kiss you, and tell you that papa is much worse, and poor mamma is all alone."

Grace, without saying a word, took her in her arms, kissed her repeatedly, and handed her bodily to me. My lips had scarcely touched the child's, when Grace pulled her from me and kissing her again, said:—

"Run home, quick, sweet, and tell mamma that we will be there in a few minutes."

As the child started to run, Grace caught my arm, saying:

"Come, quick, to the hotel."

"Had we not better go to the cottage from here, Grace? He may be dying. A few minutes may be too late."

"No, we must go to the hotel. If he is dying, as I fear he is, we should not be alone."

She fairly dragged me along in her eager haste. When we neared the veranda she paused, took a hurried look at the crowd scattered along it, and saying "wait," went in the direction of Flora's room. In a few minutes she returned, apparently greatly annoyed.

"That is always the way. When you want somebody and must have them, they are not to be found," she said.

"Whom do you want?"

"I want Uncle Tom McElroy."

"Why do you want him?" I inquired.

"Why do I want him? Because we must have him. That is the reason. He has promised to be there when he dies, and if he is not, I fear that all we talked about will be naught. I want him there so that he may take possession."

She again glanced over the crowd, went to the hotel clerk, with whom she talked for a moment, and hurrying to my side, said:

"Come on."

We started at almost a run. When near the cottage we observed Dr. and Mrs. Kirkwood ahead of us. They were walking very slowly, she, apparently leaning very heavily upon him. Just as we recognized them Sunbeam burst from the cedars and came running toward us, uttering something we could not understand.

"We are too late, Grace," I said. "He is dead." She made no response but started to run, and I at her heels. Before we reached the child, the latter had caught hold of the old doctor's hand, and commenced pulling him toward the cottage, saying:

"Oh, come quick, my papa is dying."

Grace fairly flew. Just as the doctor was in the act of taking Sunbeam in his arms, Grace gained their side. Without a word she snatched Sunbeam from earth and the doctor's hands, and bore her in her arms, still running, toward the cottage. I hurried on, but could not keep pace with Grace and her burden. Dr. Kirkwood and his wife quickened their steps. As I passed them I glanced at their faces, but did not speak. The doctor's was pale and anxious. Her's flushed, with the eyes intensely excited. As I entered the hall of the cottage I heard someone at prayer. Uncle Tom McElroy was on

his knees at the bedside. I stepped back just as the Kirkwoods entered. Raising my hand I motioned them to pause. We bowed our heads, Mrs. Kirkwood leaning against the wall. Such a prayer. I will not attempt to give it. Words would be poor dumb things, void of the life which the old man gave them. As I listened, I felt that God had to hear and had to answer. All the conditions on which His mercy and love rest, were present, and the promises had to be fulfilled. The swift winged messengers, if such there be, who perform offices between God and those who love Him on this earth, were weighted with an appeal, every word of which was sprinkled with the blood of the Crucified Christ. As the old Methodist looked into the face of the dying man, and saw the halo which rested on it, he closed his prayer, saying:

"It is enough, Father. The valley is lighted up. Amen."

"Yes, Mary, dear heart, it is all light. There is no darkness. Kiss me, dear."

As these words reached my ears I was pushed violently aside. Mrs. Kirkwood, with frenzied eyes, and face bloodless as the dead, pressed by me into the room, closely followed by the doctor. There was a scream, such as only a mother can give, and the cry,

"God of Heaven! My son!"

From the dying man came the single word, "Mother."

I sprang into the room. The old doctor had fallen on the floor near the door. His invalid wife had the dying man in her arms, alternately passionately kissing him and exclaiming:

"My boy! My boy! My long lost son! Oh, my darling, my heart! The God of our fathers is still our God. He answers prayers. He has restored you to me."

The son's arms were tightly clasped around his mother, but he spoke no word. His big bright eyes rested on his wife, who stood at the foot of the bed looking more like marble than like flesh. Her gray eyes had grown larger, and her face was colorless, while the expression was that of wonder and amazement, not unmixed with fear and joy. Grace had picked up Sunbeam and was holding her tight to her breast. Little Robbie was clinging to his mother's dress.

Uncle Tom attempted to raise the old doctor from the floor to lead him to the bedside, but his limbs refused to perform their office, and he again sank to the floor. With bowed head he exclaimed:

"Forgive me, my son, forgive me. If not for mine, for your poor suffering mother's sake, who has been sorrowing and seeking you for years. Forgive me."

"He forgives. I am not sorrowing. I am happy. Not even at his birth when my life hopes took form, was I so happy as I am now," said Mrs. Kirkwood, still holding her dying boy in her arms.

"I don't understand all this," said Uncle Tom McElroy, "but it is surely God's work, brought about in His mysterious way."

The good old man again took hold of the prostrate doctor when the dying man whispered:

"Yes, yes, lift him up that I may embrace him. Father, I am your son. Yes, you are my father. God is the Father of all and we are His children. May He grant mercy to both of us."

The mother released her clasp, and the heart-stricken father fell on his knees at the side of his son, taking the outstretched hand of his son and kissing it. He spoke no word, but a sigh escaped, as if a great sorrow was thrown from his heart. The dying man wound his arm around his father's neck and whispered:

"Your son. Father, my father."

"Yes, your father, who has sought you for years that he might plead your forgiveness, and restore you to your almost heart-broken mother, who, during all the weary years, has had but one inquiry of the world, and one prayer to God—her son."

While this scene was taking place between father and son, Mrs. Kirkwood had taken Sunbeam from Grace and was passionately kissing her, saying:—

"My heart knew you. My heart knew you. You crept into it the first moment I saw you. Call me grandma."

"Grandma," replied Sunbeam, throwing her little arms around Mrs. Kirkwood's neck.

Grace took the child and Mrs. Kirkwood returned to the bedside of the dying son. The old doctor still rested on his knees, while he clasped the hand of his son in both of his.

"All together at last," said the dying man with his eyes resting on his statue-like wife, who had stood unmoved and speechless.

"Father, mother," pointing to his wife, "this is Mary, my good, suffering, patient, loving wife, your daughter, and little Mary and Robbie, our children."

"Yes, yes," responded the old doctor, "they are mine—they are ours, your mother's and mine."

Mrs. Kirkwood walked to where Mrs. Hastings was standing, and throwing her arms around her neck, kissed her a number of times, saying:

"My daughter, my dear son's wife, I am your mother. With him you have been in my heart for years, and there you will remain always. Oh, how I have longed for years to say this, my daughter."

The large gray eyes filled with tears, the blood rushed into her face, there was a quiver and a sob, and the young wife fell forward onto the bed, her head resting at the side of her husband. He feebly stretched out his arm and encircled his wife's neck, drawing her close to his breast. His eyes closed and the pallor of death settled on his face.

"Oh, do not die. You must not, shall not die. If you do, I cannot live," exclaimed his agonized mother.

"God's will is God's love," said Uncle Tom, taking Mrs. Kirkwood's arm as though he would lead her from the bed.

"God's mercy is God's love," she replied. "In very pity he should spare him. What has life been, what can it be to me without him. I will never part with him. When he dies, I will die."

The eyes of the dying man opened. His face flushed. Life seemed to be coming back to him in response to his mother's prayer. It was only for a moment. The deathly pallor returned. Looking at his mother, in a merely audible voice, he said:

"Yes, for her and for them," pointing to his wife and children, "you must live."

"Yes, for me, Grandma," said Sunbeam reaching up her little hands.

"Oh, my Father! My heart will break. Spare, Oh, spare the rod," she exclaimed, as she took the child in her arms.

"Rather ask for strength to walk under," said Uncle Tom. "You are now, even in your sorrow, enjoying wondrous love. Ask Him to increase it by giving you strength."

"For her and them," whispered the dying son.

Mrs. Kirkwood kissed the child and then turning kissed Mrs. Hastings. Leading the latter to the bed, the mother and the wife knelt, and Mrs. Kirkwood, with clasped hands and upturned face, prayed:

"Father, for the sake of these, give me strength to pass under the rod."

"Amen," said Uncle Tom. "He will answer that prayer. He led you here that He might lead you all henceforth to the end."

"Peace, all is peace," said the dying one, closing his eyes. There were a few moments of silence, only broken by sobs. The old doctor, with head bowed, had Robbie in his arms, while Grace was pressing Sunbeam to her breast. Mrs. Kirkwood and Mrs. Hastings were still kneeling at the bedside. Uncle Tom in a low sweet voice commenced to sing, "The Home of the Soul." I am sure I never heard anything which was so sweet to me. The stillness which followed the song was painful. All were aware that the end was near. Uncle Tom and I seemed isolated, and I felt lost in the silence as though it were darkness.

Suddenly there was a quick nervous movement of the dying man. We pressed close to the bedside. The mother and the wife had risen, and with intense anxiety

were watching the expiring life. Looking at his mother, he said:

"Kiss me."

Then to his wife:

"Kiss me."

Turning to his father, he gasped:

"Yours as they were mine."

His eyes slowly closed and with the shutting out of the light, his soul went home to God. The wife and mother did not notice that he was dead, so quietly had the spirit fled.

Uncle Tom turned to Grace and said:

"He is with them."

This remark awakened the two women to consciousness.

"Dead," exclaimed his mother—"dead! My boy dead! Oh, God, pity me. Pity me. Why was he restored to me living, if but to die?"

"That you may have these," said Uncle Tom, as he led Sunbeam and Robbie to the side of Mrs. Hastings.

"Grandma, for us," said Sunbeam holding up her arms.

"God is good," said the old doctor, as he came to where the women were standing with the children. "God is very good," he continued. "My fearful burden has been rolled off, and though he is dead, he lives to me in these heart idols he has left."

Mrs. Kirkwood fell upon the dead body. Poor Mrs. Hastings stood as if dazed. Her eyes rested on vacancy, and her pale face was cold and expressionless. Her lips moved and she uttered one word:

"Alone."

At the sound of it Mrs. Kirkwood arose from the bed as if renewed strength had been given her, and turning to the widow drew her close to her bosom, saying:

"No, daughter, not alone. I am your mother as I was his, and I have promised to live for you and these," touching the heads of the children. She led Mrs. Hastings into the rear room, and seating her on a lounge, placed Sunbeam between them.

"Is papa dead?" asked the child.

"Yes, my dear little daughter, papa is dead."

"Then he will never cough any more, nor will the blood come from his mouth. They don't get sick up there, and don't cough, nor have pains, and papa is with his elder brother. Uncle Tom told me that he would be. He says Jesus is papa's elder brother, and that He wanted him with Him. I guess they are playing together now. You told me so, Uncle Tom."

"Yes, my dear little pet, I did, and it is true," replied the good old man.

"We can't see them, though, can we?"

"No, we cannot see them, yet they are together. I have a way of knowing to a certainty that your papa is with his elder brother," replied Uncle Tom.

"I know he is, too," said the child. "I feel so easy. The pain has all gone out of me. Has it gone out of you, mamma?"

"Not yet, my dear, but it is going," replied the widow.

"Resignation," repeated Mrs. Kirkwood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Scene followed scene with such rapidity that I grew lost."

Grace and Dr. Kirkwood had remained in the room with the dead, and consulted as to the disposition of the remains. It was determined to send them to the hotel as soon as they were prepared. The widow and children should be removed there immediately. Grace came to where we were to tell of the arrangements.

"You dear, should change your clothing," said Grace to Mrs. Hastings.

"I have no change. What I am wearing is the best I possess."

"Then I will go to the hotel and bring you one of mine."

"No," replied the widow.

"No," said Mrs. Kirkwood, "just as you are, my daughter."

"Just as I am, mother."

"Mother, mother," repeated Mrs. Kirkwood. "It is nearly eight years," she continued, "since I was called mother. When my son uttered it to-day it echoed through my heart. Your voice must make it familiar there."

While waiting for the carriage we entered the room where the dead man lay. Mrs. Kirkwood's attention was called to the photographs, when she said:

"Why, there is my picture."

It was the face which had haunted me.

"How changed," she said in a sad tone. Mrs. Hastings took it from the wall, saying:

"It was his greatest treasure. Since his sickness became serious it was unusual for it to be hanging. He had it in his hand almost constantly, gazing at it for hours."

"And the other pictures. Who are they?"

"Relatives of mine. My mother and her brother," replied Mrs. Hastings.

"Your mother and her brother," repeated Grace, "and who were they?"

Before answer could be given the undertaker entered, and requested our withdrawal. Grace took Mrs. Hastings' hand and led her upstairs. They did not return until the carriages arrived to take us to the hotel, to which all of us went.

Mr. McMillan returned from New York on the evening train. He informed us that on reaching the city the previous day he had been met by Mr. Philip Duncan, who was waiting to receive the body of Racketts.

"Who? Philip Duncan?" asked Grace, while I stood amazed to dumbness.

"Yes, Philip Duncan, your uncle and Miss Rebecca's brother," he replied.

The blood was all out of my heart.

"What new mystery is here?" I excitedly asked.

"No mystery," he answered. "Your brother knew the mother of Racketts. Met her one night when a fearful storm prevailed. She sheltered him, and he in return provided shelter for her and her crippled son.

The house she lived in belonged to him. About the moment when the accident occurred to Racketts, the mother was seated in her room talking to a neighbor caller, when on the instant, she threw up her hands and exclaiming, "Oh, my son!" expired instantly. Your brother believes she saw the accident in which Racketts was killed."

I burst into tears as I took Grace in my arms, exclaiming:

"Oh! Grace, it was poor dear Phil for whom they prayed that night. In answer to their prayer God reclaimed him."

Grace could make no response, but stood with her eyes cast to the floor, a very Niobe in tears.

"Yes, it was he. He told me all about it when he learned who I was. At the graves of Racketts and his mother stood your brother Phil, his wife, and two sweet little daughters. The first dews on the mounds were their tears, and the first flowers placed on them were their offerings."

Grace was still motionless, weeping, though not suffering. Mr. McMillan gently led her to a seat. When she became composed she said to him:

"I want you to go to the cottage. On the walls in the room in which Mr. Hastings died, you will find two photographs. Bring them to me."

Mr. McMillan retired. Grace came to me and kissing me, said:

"Dear, good uncle Phil."

"Oh, Grace," I exclaimed, "what will I do with my heart? It will burst."

"No, it will not. It is not even full. It will hold more, and there is more to come."

"What do you mean? Let there be no more mystery, I implore you. What new disaster awaits us?"

"No disaster. The very oil of joy will be poured into your heart. All the troubled waters will be stilled to calmness. George McMillan is Mrs. Hastings' uncle. Those photographs on the wall are likenesses, taken years ago, of his sister, Mrs. Hastings' mother, and of himself. I have sent him to bring them to me."

I was dumbfounded. Emotion gave place to wonder.

"Go to Mrs. Hastings' room. Bring her to me. I want her when he returns."

I obeyed without saying a word. In a few minutes I had her in the presence of Grace.

"I thought it better that you should be in our room. Mr. McMillan has gone for the photographs."

While Grace spoke we heard his hurried footsteps. There was a rap and entrance at the same moment. He had the photographs in his hand.

"Whose pictures are these?" he said holding them out. Before the widow, who was nervous to silence, had time to answer, Mr. McMillan continued, "Why should I ask when looking into your face. You are my sister's daughter. Mary McMillan was your mother."

"Yes," sobbed Mrs. Hastings.

She had not time to utter another word. The great stout arms of George McMillan had locked her in their embrace.

"Poor, suffering, sorrow-stricken heart, throw your burden upon me. Oh, God of love and compassion, give to me her weight of sorrow."

I could bear no more. My eyes grew filmy, and I sank into a chair, lost to everything but joy. There

seemed to be a stream rushing through my heart, every drop of which was an ecstasy. When I looked again the two women were resting their heads against his great, wide chest. The widow's eyes were closed, while those of Grace looked up into his face.

"Is there still room in it for me?" she asked.

"Room in my heart for you? Yes, my life, until all the things that are, and all the things that are to be, have decayed."

I arose and left them. Going to Dr. Kirkwood's rooms I found Mrs. Kirkwood with Sunbeam in her embrace, looking into the child's gray eyes and toying with her hair. The doctor with Robbie asleep in his arms, was seated at the window, gazing out in silence on the ocean.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"This was the tale she told."

The body was brought to the hotel and placed in one of the rooms occupied by Dr. Kirkwood. Mrs. Kirkwood had the body taken from the coffin and laid on the bed, at the side of which she kept vigil all the night.

I had an interesting talk with Dr. Kirkwood wherein he told me the story of his sorrow. I will not enter into details. His only son and only child had married, without the father's consent, a girl in the lowly walks of life. This greatly offended him, and in his anger he forbade the son to bring his wife home, but to depart forever from him. The son fled the city, taking his wife with him. Within twenty-four hours the doctor repented of his harsh act, and sought for his boy, but failed to find him. In company with Mrs. Kirkwood, he had visited all cities, and exhausted all resources, in an endeavor to discover his whereabouts. Under the stress of sorrow Mrs. Kirkwood's health failed, and they had to come to the Beach to restore it if possible. For weeks they had been within a stone's throw of the dying bed but were ignorant of the fact, untill the discovery, as I have told.

I bade the doctor and his wife good night, and went to my room where I found Grace and Mrs. Hastings. As I entered, the latter rose to depart, when I said:

"Stay. I want to talk to you. I have just left Dr. Kirkwood. He told me the story of his sorrow. Won't you tell me yours?"

"Yes, if you will wait until I visit the dead. I wanted to sit with mother, but she will not permit it. Says I am worn out and must rest."

I was impatient to hear it, but complied with her request. Grace said that she knew much of it. In a few minutes Mrs. Hastings returned. I arranged seats for three of us near the window.

"I know little of my infancy. My mother died when I was a child of nine. My recollection is that her married life was unhappy, I frequently found her in tears, on which occasions she would take me in her arms and weep still more bitterly. After the death of my mother, my father put me to live with strangers, in a village of central New York. I remained there until I was twelve years of age. My father visited me twice during these years. He met me coldly, without the slightest exhibition of affection. On a third visit he brought me to the city of New York, and placed me in a family where I was required to aid in the housework. During the first year he visited me frequently. Then his visits grew less frequent, months elapsing between them. I was walking one morning in the winter time, when I met two ladies. Just as I was passing them one slipped and fell. I ran to her aid. As I endeavored to raise her from the pavement, she said:

'Let me remain. Can you get a carriage? I have broken my limb.'

"I then observed that she was young and beautiful, and that her companion was old and infirm. I went and secured a carriage. Quite a crowd had gathered around them, and when I got there with the carriage, had no difficulty in having her lifted into it. I helped the elderly woman in, and as I stepped back the younger one said:

'Please get in. I will send you home.'

"I complied. They lived in an elegant home on one of the fashionable streets. After seeing them safely in the house, I was about to leave, when the sufferer said:

'Not yet. Wait until the physician has been here.'

"I did so, making her as comfortable as I could. When I left, I promised to return in the morning to learn her condition. This I did for several mornings, during one of which visits she learned my history, and I her name—Lawson. She expressed great sympathy for me, and offered me a permanent home, but I refused her kindness, not knowing then that in a few days I should be compelled to accept it. On returning from one of these visits, Mrs. Collins, (that was the name of the family with whom I lived) informed me that I must seek a new place, as my father had neglected for a year to pay the pittance agreed upon, besides my labor, for my board. I was fearfully shocked. I went to my room where I fell prostrate on the floor, and wept tears of desolation. Then I knelt and prayed to the God of the orphan. A great comfort came to me, and I arose feeling that my prayer would be answered. I returned

to Mrs. Lawson's. On entering the room I burst into tears, and in reply to her inquiry, told her my distress.

'Thank God that you are homeless,' she said, as she reached out her arms for me. I went to her bedside, and she drew me down and kissed me. That was the first kiss I had received since the death of my mother. It thrilled me as though electric. My heart leaped and the blood raced through my veins and arteries. 'This is your home,' she added.

"I cannot describe my feelings. When I got to the room assigned me I wept for joy. In the course of a few months Mrs. Lawson fully recovered.

"I will not go into a detailed history of her life. It is enough to say it was full of trouble. She was unhappily married. Her husband was scarcely ever at home. After Mrs. Lawson recovered, she sent me to school, and for three years I was thus happily situated. At this time the old lady, Mrs. Lawson's mother, died, and within two weeks thereafter Mr. Lawson came home. It was his third visit while I lived with the family. One morning Mrs. Lawson informed me that her husband desired her to accompany him to Europe, and that she had made provision for my continuance at school. They gave up their house and sold their furniture. I was placed to board in an excellent family. Robert Kirkwood visited the young lady members of this family, and I made his acquaintance. From our first meeting we were attracted to each other. His visits became more frequent, and his society more necessary to my happiness. He finally proposed marriage. I loved him more dearly than I did life but I told him I would not give an answer until I had consulted my benefactress. I wrote her, but no answer came. Mr.

Kirkwood, (that is Robert) grew impatient and importunate. One morning I received a letter from Paris, the superscription of which I did not recognize. I opened it tremblingly, and the contents were:

'Mrs. Lawson is dead. Before dying she requested me to inform you of the fact.

Respectfully,

L. D. Lawson.'

"Everything turned to darkness. It appeared as though the sun were blotted from the heavens. I could hear but one sound and that was the word 'alone' ringing in my ears. I was beside myself with grief. While in this condition Robert Kirkwood called. I handed him the letter and when he had finished reading it, he clasped me in his arms, saying:—

'Now you are mine. I must protect you from the world. I can only protect you as my wife. You are alone and cannot impose any reasonable conditions.'

"That evening we were married. On the following morning he informed me of his father's anger, and the penalty he imposed—my desertion or his exile from his home.

'What will become of me?' I exclaimed in agony.

'What will become of you?' he repeated, 'you are my wife, and I will part with earth and heaven before I will part with you.'

"I lost consciousness. When it returned I was resting on his breast. Within twenty-four hours we had quitted the city. We went direct to New Orleans. For the purpose of evading pursuit, Mr. Kirkwood assumed the name of Hastings—my maiden name. Be-

ing a good French, Spanish and English scholar, he got employment in a large commission house. Within a year he was sent to Rio and I accompanied him. Little Mary was born the first year, and we remained there five years.

"The business of the house prospered, and we were very happy. However, there was a shadow stretching from his father's house, which at times cast a gloom in ours. His love for his mother was of the most passionate character, and he had a constant longing to see her. His health began to fail. We determined to return. On reaching New Orleans he was not improved, and was much disheartened. Physicians claimed that they could restore him to health. We used all remedies to do so. Our means were being rapidly depleted. He became better and then we came north to New York City. It was his intention to visit his parents. One morning he started to do so. He met his father on the street, looked into his face and imagined that his father knew him but refused to recognize him. He was discarded. Then a foolish pride slipped in, and he did not call on his mother. Oh, what a mistake that was. Had he followed the promptings of his heart, all would have been well, and to-day he would have been living and happy. We came here last May one year ago, hoping that the salt air would renew his strength. We were very poor. I took in light washing. Poor crippled Racketts was one of my first acquaintances. Mr. Kirkwood improved a little during the first summer, but last winter, near the close of it, he failed rapidly. Spring brought no renewal of strength. Then Grace came, and Uncle Tom and a sweet light partially dispelled our

sorrow. The morning you came to visit me I was washing a lace handkerchief in the corner of which was delicately written the word 'Kirkwood.' I answered your inquiry by replying, 'Only a name, only a name. You know the rest.'"

"Yes," I replied, "it has been a suffering past. It will be a cruel future which will deny you happiness."

I kissed her good night and we all retired.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"His humors, though violent, were wholesome."

As we were on our way to breakfast this morning we met Mr. Cowls. He came to a halt, as he saw us approaching, propped himself on his crutches, and stood uncovered, with his hands raised in benediction.

"God bless you. God bless both of you," he said.

"God's blessing on us all," replied Grace.

"Yes, on all who suffer and all who love," returned Mr. Cowls.

"Those who do not, need his blessing most," replied Grace.

"But do not deserve it so much," rejoined Mr. Cowls.

We chatted with him for a few moments, and as we parted his hands were again raised in a plea for our care and happiness.

After breakfast we went to the beach. Grace pointed to the ships in motion saying:

"Some are going and some returning. Such is life. Coming and going make up the whole of existence. We go to-day."

"To-day," I said, in surprise.

"Yes, to-day. Our lives have become strangely mixed up with those of Dr. Kirkwood and his family, and we will accompany them to New York. Mr McMil-

lan and Flora, of course will go, and it is better that we go also. Our visit here is over. All its ends and purposes have culminated. We have been led in strange paths to strange deliverances. Without positive aims that which I most desired has taken place. Do not misunderstand me, aunt. I do not refer to the incident most directly connected with me as an individual. I mean that I have learned so much of real life—that life is made up of duties and responsibilities, and they are idlers who fail to assume the one and perform the other."

Again she turned to the sea and was silent. The gentle wind was tossing her hair over her temples, and her exquisite face was increased in loveliness by the quiet, thoughtful expression which rested upon it. In a reflective way, she said:—

"Poor Uncle Tom McElroy, he suffers a double pain. He had determined to adopt the widow and the two children and take them to his western home. They have found new hearts in which to nestle, and there is a big vacant place in Uncle Tom's. Now he says 'It is best as it is.' Were he not so good he would be unhappy. He is going to the city with us and will be our guest."

The Express Company took charge of the dead, and relieved Dr. Kirkwood and Mr. McMillan. When we descended from our carriage at the station, we observed Mr. Cowls seated in a buggy. Potts was his driver, having taken Racketts' place. Grace and I went to him to bid him good bye.

"God bless you both," he said. "God bless you both."

"He'll miss you very much, ladies, yes, very much, yes," said Mr. Potts. "It will be dull to him without you, yes, very."

We waved them good bye from the car window as the train started. Mr. Cowls was uncovered, with his head bowed, while Mr. Potts kept sawing the air with his right hand, uttering something which we could not hear, and at the same time looking across his nose at the bowed head at his side.

Dr. Kirkwood was seated with Robbie on his knees, or rather all over him. Sunbeam and her grandmother were on the same seat. All the way to the city Mrs. Kirkwood toyed with the child's hair, or patted her cheeks, or submitted to the affectionate clinging of the little one, around her neck. Flora and the young widow sat together, and Mr. McMillan and Grace occupied another seat. Uncle Tom was seated at my side. I am in love with the Methodists. En route he described to me the labors, glories and triumphs of the pioneers. I am in love with their sacrifices—their courage—their devotion—their inspiration, and their consecration. While he protested that he was not one of them, he acknowledged that he had learned at their feet. He is a type of them. They must have more closely resembled the character of the Nazarene, than any other class of men who have aided in spreading the sweet truths which were uttered on the Mount of Beatitudes by the loving Master.

As we whirled along, he, at my request, sang to me in lowest and sweetest tones, "The Home of the Soul." My heart ran out with the song story, until I longed to be of those who walk with God. He also told me of a young man who bears his name, an only child, who is

far away among the benighted, proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ the Lord. He has promised to write to his son and speak to him of me, and I have promised, well, no matter what, but I will keep it when called upon to fulfill it. He must be like Uncle Tom.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"The end will ease our hearts."

Christmas has come and gone. We had a wedding. Grace is very happy, as indeed we all are. She did not go away on a marriage trip, but remained at home. Mr. Cowls is still our guest, though he came to remain only until the morning after the wedding. Mr. Preston will not permit him to return to his Philadelphia home for a week yet. Just before he came over he sent Potts down to the beach with well filled hampers, baskets, etc. He says he is anxious to hear what the blind girl said when she saw the array of good things.

Yesterday we drove to the cemetery. He wanted to see the graves of Racketts and his mother. There is a plain marble shaft over it, and the inscription on it is "To Racketts and his Mother." On the base, in relief, is the figure of a little dog, with the word "Major" under it

As we were leaving Mr. Cowls uncovered his head and said:

"God bless all who suffer, and all who love," and we all said, "Amen."

THE END.

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